



Chic and sinister . . . Elmgreen and Dragset's Nordic pavilion



Blood, oil and designer rugs: the world's top artists get set for the Venice Biennale

Don't expect to bump into anyone from the British art world this week: the entire tribe has flown these shores. It's the opening of the Venice Biennale - the bellini-soaked gathering of the international clan of artists, curators, critics, dealers and collectors. The parties are numerous, and fun, but they are a sideshow: the biennale is a moment when artists really push the boat out with their best work.

Each nation fields an artist to compete for the Golden Lion, the art equivalent of the Palme d'Or; artists show their work in little pavilions dotted around the Venetian public gardens, the Giardini. This year, Britain is represented by Steve McQueen, whose debut feature film, *Hunger*, first screened to general acclaim at the 2008 Cannes festival. His work for Venice is a closely guarded secret, but all will be revealed when the first VIPs

see his film (we're assuming that's what it is) this morning.

The US, meanwhile, has commissioned Bruce Nauman; Germany has the British artist Liam Gillick, who has produced much of his work there; and the Russian pavilion is this year presenting a group show under the title of *Victory*, which promises to be highly contentious. Andrei Molodkin will pour blood and oil into hollow glass sculptures shaped like the *Victory of Samothrace*, the famous antique sculpture. Another artist in the show is Alexey Kallima, born in Grozny, whose past work has provided trenchant comment on recent Chechen history.

A more gently ironic approach is expected from the irreverent artists Elmgreen and Dragset. The Danish/Norwegian pair were approached to create installations for both the Danish and the Nordic pavilions. Instead of turning one down, they persuaded the

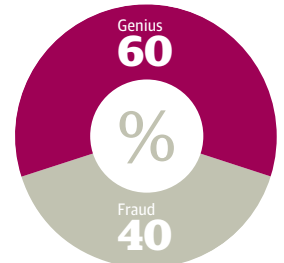
commissioners to take a transnational approach and let them do both. They have transformed their pavilions into a pair of art collectors' houses - the Nordic a chic, modernist bachelor pad; the Danish a slightly run-down, rather Hitchcockian environment.

The Nordic pavilion (*above*), says Michael Elmgreen, "will contain artworks that are queer-related, such as photographs by Wolfgang Tillmans". All is not well, though: in the pavilion's swanky swimming pool (think David Hockney's *LA*), "our collector is floating face down. He got punished for his hedonistic lifestyle."

The Danish pavilion, meanwhile, will have a *For Sale* sign outside. "There's a telephone number you can ring if you want to buy it, and we have a real-estate agent to give tours," says Elmgreen. The national pavilions of the Giardini, he adds, "would make swanky houses, but most of them are shit as art spaces".

The poll

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Michael Jackson tells fans he was not behind the decision to extend his upcoming London residency



Birtwistle: witness for the prosecution

Cellist Adrian Bradbury is suing the Lowry, Salford. Why? Because when he took his family to see *The Wizard of Oz* some months ago, the show was billed as a musical, but there was no live music - and Bradbury wants his money back. Deliciously, Sir Harrison Birtwistle (*above*) has provided an expert report. "The *Wizard of Oz*," he writes, "is a musical, composed for a cast of singers/actors with orchestral accompaniment, with a musical director . . . Without the orchestra or MD, a performance of *The Wizard of Oz* is best described as karaoke." The serious point is that removing live accompaniment from shows cheats audiences and destroys musicians' livelihoods.