

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Political works respond to the world

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The art extravaganza that is the Venice Biennale opens its doors tomorrow, inviting the visitor into a wide, multidimensional world of contemporary creations.

"In difficult times, in complex times, you have works of art completely different from each other that are hinting at the same situation from a completely different point of view," Daniel Birnbaum, the Swedish director of the venerable show's 53rd edition, said.

Thus, a crude wooden *Greater G8 Advertising Market Stand* by Zambian artist Anawana Haloba offers products from poor Third World countries, while South Africa's Moshekwa Langa suggests sweatshop exploitation with his installation of industrial spools of thread, toy cars and empty bottles.

Then there is the real world, where "there is no art that is absent from history," according to Birnbaum, who at 46 is the youngest curator in the Biennale's 114-year history.

A disturbing shadow play by Hong Kong-born Paul Chan, titled *Sade for Sade's Sake*, evokes the torture by U.S. soldiers at Iraq's Abu Ghraib jail. The digital projection of shadows on a plain brick wall shows human forms masturbating or having sex standing up, as well as detached human parts, pulsating all the while.

Briton Steve McQueen (director of the acclaimed film *Hunger*) suggests a desirable sort of indifference as one possible story line among many in his 30-minute film *Giardini* set in one of the two venues of the Biennale, the gardens at the end of Venice's Castello island. In it, scenes of the gardens in the rain, and of three dogs idly foraging in mounds of leaves or rubbish alternate with close-ups of colourful insects.

The event, which runs until November 22, boasts a new participation record, with 90 artists in the main program and 77 countries represented in the pavilions.

