

Island Nations Seize the Venice Biennale Spotlight to Decry Climate Change



Courtesy of the Artist

Vincent J.F. Huang's "In The Name of Civilization"

pavilions are specifically designed to be a call to action and awareness about global warming.

The [Maldives pavilion](#), "Portable Nation: Disappearance as a Work in Progress – Approaches to Ecological Romanticism," will be hosted at the **Gervasuti Foundation** and curated by **Khaled Ramadan**, **Aida Eltorie**, and **Alfredo Cramerotti** of the collective **Chamber of Public Secrets**. The roster of international artists includes **DJ Spooky**, who will perform "Maldives Adagio," a piece based on data sonification of the tides and currents around the Maldives archipelago, on the opening night.

Ramadan will show a film he is making about the current socio-political problems facing the people of the Maldives, which he told **ARTINFO** via email include not just global warming, but "the corrupt tourism industry" and the struggle "to balance their life between modernity and traditions." There will also be two Maldivian artists in the group, **Moomin Fouad** and **Mohamed Ali**, who will present their film "Happy Birthday."

In another Maldives pavilion project, "[The Ice Monolith](#)" by Italian artist **Stefano Cagol**, a tower of ice will be placed on the crowded Riva degli Schiavoni where it will melt before the eyes of passersby. **Patrizio Travagli**'s work "Pantheistic-Polifacetic" is also a tower, but this one will be made of over 500 mirrors. Visitors will be asked to photograph a reflection that they seek to capture as their own memory and email it to the artist. In addition, the art collective **Wooloo** will release Maldivian coconuts into the canals of Venice. The coconut palm is the national tree of the Maldives and is part of the country's official emblem. Adrift on the water, the coconuts will represent "the resilience and fragility of nature," according to the artists' statement.

For its pavilion, Tuvalu has taken the opposite approach and will show the work of a single artist. "[Destiny Intertwined](#)," curated by **An-Yi Pan**, **Szu Hsien-Li**, and **Shu Ping Shih**, will present the work of **Vincent J.F. Huang**, an eco-artist who works in London and Taipei and has previously drawn attention to Tuvalu's plight with artwork presented at the **U.N. Conference on Climate Change** in Copenhagen in 2009. In his artist's statement, Huang points out that although Tuvalu has one of the lowest levels of carbon emissions in the world, it is on track to be one of the first countries disastrously affected by global warming.

Tuvalu's pavilion will be divided over two venues, with small sculptures and paintings being shown at the **Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia** and large installations at **Forte Marghera**. Forte Marghera will house "In the Name of Civilization," a large installation depicting an oil well that is simultaneously decapitating a sea turtle and suspending a chained bull by the feet.

Huang will also bring some of his "animal victims" to Venice — sculptures depicting what he described in an email as "the first victims suffering

by Kate Deimling

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Film still from Khaled Ramadan's film that will be shown at the Maldives Pavilion

Venice is a city always haunted by the specter of rising tides. But when the **Venice Biennale** returns this

summer, it'll be impossible to escape the issue, courtesy two island nations who are using the art festival to make a point about the looming threat posed to their existence by climate change. Tuvalu, which is halfway between Hawaii and Australia in the Pacific Ocean, and the Maldives, located about 250 miles southwest of India in the Indian Ocean, could both be wiped out by rising sea levels, and their Venice

from human impact in the age of climate change.” These works include penguins dressed as terra cotta warriors of Imperial China and, most shockingly, a polar bear holding the decapitated head of **Barack Obama** in its jaws.

Also on view will be the artist’s “Modern Atlantis Project,” an aquarium with live coral growing on reproductions of iconic sculptures and landmarks of Western civilization, including **Michelangelo**’s “David,” the Statue of Liberty, the winged lion in St. Mark’s Square in Venice, the Eiffel Tower, and Big Ben.

Amidst all the hubbub and pageantry of the Biennale, will these pavilions be able to focus international attention on the dire effects of global warming? Maldives pavilion curator Ramadan said that the curators’ approach “is mainly to address the issue of climate change in a theoretical manner,” since “to inspire concrete political action about global warming is probably too ambitious.”

On the other hand, the Tuvalu curators are hoping “not only to call for political attention, but to ask individual audiences to evaluate how their behaviors would impact the environment,” pavilion organizer **Faye Y. Chen** told ARTINFO via email. “Will mankind’s seeking unnatural paths and demand for resources to fulfill human ‘progress’ bring us towards a brave new world or a disastrous end?”

[To see work from the Maldives and Tuvalu pavilions, click on the slideshow.](#)