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Launch Speech



Australian Institute of Architects

**Melbourne:** Louise Wright

**Sydney:** Mauro Baracco

On behalf of our Creative Team I'd like to announce the theme for the Australian Pavilion 2018 at the 16th International La Biennale di Venezia Architettura: Repair.

Since we've been making buildings and cities in Australia it has mostly been to separate us from the natural environment. Consequences of the disregard of natural systems are now being felt and there is a shift of thinking amongst built environment disciplines towards repairing the natural environment as a meaningful and enduring framework for urban form - an expansion of the natural environment in a sort of reverse order of urban sprawl.

Repair as an approach to architectural thinking, that is, how can architecture play a role in repairing the places it is part of, is set to become a critical strategy of architectural culture. It is particularly relevant to Australian architects who work cheek by jowl in one of the most diverse and ecologically sensitive landscapes in the world, where the pre-settlement condition can still often be known and understood. Uniquely, our cities are interspersed and bordered by remnant vegetation and often connected to larger natural systems through their siting on waterways and across Australia we occupy or impact in one way or another a lot of our different types of ecologies. Lets also remember that our cities are built over and around the traditional cultural landscapes of our First Nations peoples.

Louise and I have often struggled with our relationship as Architects in the use of land. Its no small act. For a while, we've been thinking about this in our office, teaching and research activity. We don't have any definitive solutions, but believe there is a role for architecture to actively engage with the repair of the places it is part of, the soil, hydrology, habitat, connections, overland water flow, microorganisms, vegetation and so on, and that this type of repair is critical to enacting other wider types of social, economic and cultural repair. We see this first move, as a repair of the natural environment. How we as architects can do this will be an exciting development of an architecture not yet fully imagined. Our hunch is that it requires trans disciplinary methods, a coming together across disciplinary boundaries, and a widening of the architectural knowledge base to a front end detailed understanding of a site across multiple scales, where the very small scale

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action has a role in the large scale, and a facilitation of repair of the environment through the many decisions we make.

In this way, Repair at the 2018 Biennale aims to expand the point of view from the object of architecture, to the way it operates in its context; and to advocate a role for architecture among the many players it takes to repair something.

This way of presenting an alternative perspective is central to the theme of the next Biennale, Freespace. The curators, Shelley McNamara and Yvonne Farrell of Grafton Architects, have asked participants to “encourage reviewing ways of thinking, new ways of seeing the world, of inventing solutions where architecture provides for the well being and dignity of each citizen on this fragile planet”. Repair will address Farrell and McNamara’s call “to stimulate discussion on core architectural values”<sup>1</sup> and to validate the “relevance of architecture on this dynamic planet”<sup>2</sup>.

The encouragement to review ways of thinking, is also an approach that can be found in the work of Australian Artist Linda Tegg. In 2014 Linda installed a grassland in front of the State Library of Victoria revealing what once was on this site. It was a powerful and direct move. Louise and I are excited to be collaborating with Linda on a living installation for the Australian Pavilion that will aim to remind us what is at stake when we occupy land. Alongside this installation Australian projects that address the theme of repair will be presented so that we can unpack possible iterations of this approach, and as of this evening, submissions can be made via the Australian Institute of Architects webpage.

We take this moment to invite the architecture profession, including multi-disciplinary teams, to start the discussion around repair by submitting projects for consideration to be exhibited. This discussion we hope will continue up to and during the biennale, with symposiums unpacking the theme, proposed in Australia during the biennale event, engaging the profession with issues around repair and initiate what we hope will be a legacy of the 2018 biennale.

As well as Linda, we have also invited a broad team to support the framing and development of the theme that includes architect Paul Memmott, landscape architect Chris Sawyer, landscape architect and urban designer Tim O’Loan, curatorial advisor Catherine Murphy, ecologist David Freudenberger, Architect lance

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van Maanen and Graduate of Architecture Jonathan Ware. Over the next months we will be working with our team to explore the nuance and possibilities of this theme.

We are also excited to present the visual identity of Repair, developed with Studio Round, where the word repair sits provocatively across the word Australia, and opens new space full of possibility.

We'd like to thank our team, the Venice Biennale Committee, the Institute of Architects, Studio Round and the sponsors, particularly Austral Bricks for their support.

We leave you with a few images of what we have been up to over the past few weeks, where Linda and Louise/I travelled to Italy to oversee the sowing of 30 000 seeds of 65 species of western plains grassland plants for use in the installation... they are growing as we speak. This is a plant community of which only 1% remains in Victoria. And with that statistic, we hope to see you all in Venice next year or around Australia as we unpack the theme repair together.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://architectureau.com/articles/theme-rvealed-for-2018-venice-architecture-biennale/>, accessed 15.06.2017

<sup>2</sup> <http://architectureau.com/articles/theme-rvealed-for-2018-venice-architecture-biennale/>, accessed 15.06.2017