

The Daily Telegraph

Sydney Opera House right on song for Biennale artist Oliver Beer

By Elizabeth Fortescue, December 14, 2017



British artist Oliver Beer (left) and Lebanese artist Rayyane Tabet at the Sydney Opera House. Both artists will present performances of their work as part of the Biennale of Sydney 2018. Picture: Anna Kucera

YOU couldn't really say that Oliver Beer has been singing at the Sydney Opera House. It's more that he's been getting the Opera House to sing to him. The British artist, a trained composer, has spent the last month squeezing himself into the Opera House's strangest little nooks where not even the cleaners go.

Once there, Beer has softly hummed a vocal scale, calibrating his voice minutely until the space revealed its mysterious sweet spot that caused it to sing back to him — like a wine glass when you run your finger around its rim.

Beer has even crouched in the tiny cavities under the points of the building's sails.

The average person would never get this kind of access. But Beer was granted a special pass because he is one of 69 artists from around the world who will exhibit their work in next year's Biennale of Sydney.

It's a little known fact, Beer says, that every building can sing. And the Opera House sings like a diva. "The whole building is an instrument," he says.

Anyone can get a building to sing if they know how to do it, he says.

"If you whisper the right frequency, the room will sing its note back at you louder than your own voice," Beer says.

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Beer's musical research on the building will culminate in a series of performances by professional singers that will take place at the Opera House during the three-month Biennale, which opens to the public on March 16.

Beer has taken snippets of the singers' usual repertoire and reformed them around the key of the spaces at the Opera House.

"The experience (will be) as if the building is doing a duet with the bodies of the singers," he says.

The Opera House inspired one other performance-based work in preparation for the Biennale. It is by Lebanese artist Rayyane Tabet, who studied architecture.

Biennale artistic director Mami Kataoka yesterday released the list of artists she selected. The most famous is Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei who will present his immense installation, Law of the Journey, on Cockatoo Island.

The work is an inflatable boat with 250 human figures representing refugees. Ai will give the Biennale keynote speech at the Opera House on March 15.

Apart from the Opera House, Biennale venues will be the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, the Art Gallery of NSW, Artspace at Woolloomooloo, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Cockatoo Island and Carriageworks at Eveleigh.

One of the Carriageworks pieces will be a four-channel video projection by Chen Shaoxiong, a prominent Chinese artist who died last year. Chen's four-channel video projection shows the views from his hospital bed.