

# Take your partners and make up your minds, the Biennale has begun



**Adam Fulton**

CARS explode on Cockatoo Island, a tank and a stealth jet occupy a harbourside gallery and beehives in the Botanic Gardens are camouflaged. Art has broken out across Sydney.

The 17th Biennale of Sydney "reflects our world as it is, rather than as we're told it is", said the man leading the charge, David Elliott, who as artistic director has gathered about 450 works from artists in 36 countries for what is touted as Australia's leading and largest art festival.

The modern art - traversing installation, sculpture, painting, film, cross-media and performance - goes from the sublime (110 Aboriginal memorial poles in the Museum of Contemporary Art) to the bizarre (a giant ship sculpture with oozing foam and pierced baby-doll faces on Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay).

"You will have a chance to make up your own minds," Elliott said of the selection.

At the MCA yesterday, dancers performed a piece linking a 1970s American dance with Mormon polygamy. The piece - portraying "sister-wives" or multiple wives - is by Angela Ellsworth, a US artist who is also showing nine pearl-covered bonnets representing a polygamist's wives.

The exploding cars form the biggest work, suspended mid-air in a gigantic hall. The harbour island and the MCA are the main venues among seven in the free, 12-week festival, themed The Beauty of Distance, which starts today.

There will be free ferries to and from the island, where the line between art and life is blurred.

The boatbuilding going on nearby isn't part of the exhibition. "I applied," a worker joked, "but was rejected."

The Arts Minister, Virginia Judge, has announced an extra \$400,000 in funding.

Sister wives ... dancers dressed as Mormons in a performance work by Angela Ellsworth, previewed at the Museum of Contemporary Art yesterday. Photo: Kate Geraghty