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FROM THIS MONTH SYDNEY BIENNALE HEADLINES THE MOST DAZZLING WORK BY THE WORLD'S TOP CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS SUSIE BURGE LISTS THE MUST-SEE EXHIBITIONS

The artistic director for this year's Sydney Biennale is international curator. writer, broadcaster and museum director David Elliott, a man who is articulate, famously knowledgeable and passionate about contemporary art practice. His theme is "The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age", explored in myriad ways by a brilliant selection of works across a diverse range of mediums, including performance.

This year's major venues are Cockatoo Island and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), with the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney Opera House, Royal Botanic Gardens, Pier 2/3 and Artspace also involved. Two outstanding installations crystallise different aspects of the theme: 110 larrakitj (or memorial poles), by 41 Yolngu artists from North East Arnhem Land, rise like a forest in the heart of the MCA, while at Cockatoo Island the Chinese-born, New York-based Cai Guo-Qiang considers the beauty and terror of destruction with cars exploding and rotating through space in the vast Turbine Shed. Don't miss either of these.

Brook Andrew at Cockatoo Island

This Sydney-born, Melbourne-based emerging artist is known for inserting the culture and motifs of his indigenous heritage into works that incorporate a wide range of references, including media, politics, anthropology and pop culture. For the Biennale, he has created an instantly arresting outdoor sculpture: a jumping castle painted in his signature black and white striped repeating diamond shapes, based on a Wiradjuri design traditionally inscribed on trees. It's a contemporary war memorial, designed as if for children, but only people over 16 years of age will be allowed on it. To jump, or not to jump?

Jake and Dinos Chapman at MCA

The London-based Chapman brothers are edgy, to say the least. They started out working as assistants to artists Gilbert and George and have gone on to make controversial, sardonic works parodving children's art, ethnographic art and the legacy of pop art. Their work is politically charged: it's antiglobalisation, questioning industrial colonisation and consumerist capitalism. Their retrospective — the elegantly titled Shitrospective — is a miniaturised, schematic display of highlights of their work since the early 1990s.

Louise Bourgeois at MCA

French-born, New York-based Bourgeois is a grand dame of modern and contemporary art. In 1999 she became the first artist ever to exhibit in the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern, and in 2008 was awarded France's







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Legion of Honour medal. Her work is extraordinarily moving. In Echo a suite of seven sculptures derive from items in her wardrobe: disembodied clothes, draped, stretched and stitched together, then cast in bronze and painted white. These haunting shapes resonate with presence and absence, sexuality and nurturing.

Jennifer Wen Ma at Sydney Opera House and AGNSW

This multimedia artist, born in Beijing and based in New York, is an international rising star. In 2009 the

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain commissioned a work, and she was the youngest member of the core creative team working on the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. In Sydney she has an installation, Petrified Garden, in the foyer of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and she's also creating a stunning ephemeral work in which an animated image of the Monkey King (Chinese symbol of rebellion and mischief) is projected onto a smoke cloud above the sails of the Sydney Opera House.

SuperDeluxe@Artspace

Woolloomooloo gallery Artspace is transformed into a bar, club and interactive performance space by Tokyo's way-cool venue SuperDeluxe for the Biennale. Amazing Japanese performers will combine with fun PechaKucha nights, devised by architects Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, when artists and designers make presentations of 20 slides lasting 20 seconds each, on any topic.

The 17th Biennale of Sydney runs from May 12-Aug 1, www.biennaleofsydney.com.au.

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