Art Museum exhibition to travel to Venice Biennale

By Dianne Cripe

The U.S. Information Agency has announced that "Billie: Viola: Buried Secrets," curated by ASU Art Museum Director Marilyn Zetlin, will represent the United States at the 1995 Venice Biennale in Italy. This is a wonderful opportunity for an international audience to take a look at the world and the kind of art coming from the West," Zetlin said. Viola resides in Long Beach, Calif. "It is a significant honor for the museum and the university to serve as the organizer on behalf of the United States at an arts festival of this stature," said ASU President Parris Coor. "It pleases us that Marilyn Zetlin and her colleagues have been recognized with this honor, particularly as it points to the quality of exhibitions organized by the ASU Art Museum." Viola will create five new video-sound installation works for the five spaces of the United States Pavilion at the international art exposition. Although each work is an independent unit, together they describe a journey, both physical and conceptual. Their themes are darkness-light, internal-external, past-present and manifest the story of American art in the 1920s. "Bill is one of the most important artists today," Zetlin said. "The profundity of his content and the beauty of his work affect the viewer on an emotional and visceral level." The content of Viola's work is drawn from ancient iconography, including themes such as fire and ice. "It is a deeply personal and emotionally driven work," Zetlin said. "In "Veiling," parallel layers of scrim (transparent fabric) hang across the space of a white-walled gallery. Two projectors at opposite ends of the room project images into the woody-woven fabric. The images of human figures plunge into a illuminated pool at night, as viewed from underwater. The layers of fabric diffuse the light and the images dissipate in intensity and lose focus as they penetrate into the layers. The viewer is drawn into a collection of images that is visually interacting as gestural presences in the middle viewer, leaving questions about the fabric layers, moving the images. "It is important that the U.S. be represented by work that uses a vocabulary that addresses large themes," Zetlin said. "Bill is at the cutting edge of new technology in a powerfully eloquent way." Following its presentation at the Biennale, "Bill Viola: Buried Secrets" will be exhibited at the ASU Art Museum. "I am very pleased to have had the support of the university in a project of this magnitude. The museum has a talented and ambitious staff that can meet this tremendous challenge," Zetlin said. "I am also grateful that significant financial support has come from local sources as well as national foundations."

Viola's installation works have been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City; Los Angeles County Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and numerous other American and European museums.

The Venice Biennale, founded in 1951, is considered the oldest international arts festival, celebrating its centennial in 1995. Twenty-seven freestanding pavilions represent countries from Europe, North and South America, Japan and several geographic regions. Although the Biennale is usually held in May, the festival is expected to run from June to October. The Biennale is a public-private enterprise that raises funds from the private sector as well as receiving sizable contributions from the U.S. government.

Among the artists who have represented the United States are Louise Bourgeois (1993), Jenny Holzer (1990), Jasper Johns (1988) and Robert Rauschenberg (1965).

ASU Art Museum, in the Nelson Fine Arts Center, is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free. Hours are 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday; and 1-5 p.m. Sunday. q