

**CONFERENCE &  
1<sup>st</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
REPORT**

10-13 July, 2014  
Berlin

**INTERNATIONAL  
B I E N N I A L  
ASSOCIATION**

*The IBA is a platform for establishing, researching and exchanging knowledge and information necessary for institutions and professionals, who plan and curate periodic art events such as biennials and triennials, artists, researchers and others concerned with contemporary art.*

*The IBA is a center for producing multidisciplinary discourse that embodies the productive and discursive voices of the contemporary art world. It develops a range of diverse programs to promote rights and mutual understanding between institutions and their individual members, who play pivotal roles in research and practice.*

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## Conference & 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly Program

Thursday, 10 July, 2014

Registration Day

Schedule	Event and Venue
10:00 – 20:00	<p><b>Reception</b>            Welcome kit and information folders            Venue: KW Institute for Contemporary Art            Address: Auguststr. 69, 10117 Berlin</p>
15:00 – 17:30	<p><b>Introduction to the 8th Berlin Biennale</b>  <b>Juan A. Gaitán</b>, Curator, 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art            Venue: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, courtyard            Address: Auguststr. 69, 10117 Berlin</p>
18:00 – 20:00	<p><b>Opening of <i>Moshekwa Langa: The Jealous Lover</i></b>            Venue: ifa Gallery            Address: Linienstr. 139/140, 10115 Berlin</p>
20:00 – 23:00	<p><b>Welcome Banquet</b>            Venue: Café Bravo c/o KW Institute for Contemporary Art, courtyard            Address: Auguststr. 69, 10117 Berlin</p>

Friday, 11 July, 2014

Conference: “Why Biennial? Why Associate?”

Schedule	Event and Venue
10:00 – 18:00	<p><b>Reception</b>            Venue: Haus der Kulturen der Welt            Address: John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10, 10557 Berlin</p>

15:00 – 17:30	<p><b>Welcome and Introduction</b>  <b>Gabriele Horn</b>, Director, KW Institute for Contemporary Art/<b>Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art</b>  <b>Marieke van Hal</b>, Interim Vice President IBA/Founding Director, Biennial Foundation</p>
10:30 – 11:15	<p><b>Keynote Lecture: Why Biennial?</b>  Maria Hlavajova, Artistic Director, BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht and FORMER WEST</p>
11:15 – 11:45	<p><b>Coffee Break</b></p>
11:45 – 13:30	<p><b>Panel Discussion: Biennial Writing- Re-assessing Art History</b>  <b>Bruce Altshuler</b>, Director, Museum Studies Program, New York University  <b>Nicolas Bourriaud</b>, Director, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts/ Curator, Taipei Biennial 2014  <b>Juan A. Gaitán</b>, Curator, 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art  Moderated by <b>Koyo Kouoh</b>, Founding Director, RAW Material Company</p>
13:30 – 14:45	<p><b>Lunch</b></p>
14:45 – 15:00	<p><b>Welcome and Introduction</b>  <b>Yongwoo Lee</b>, Interim President IBA/President Gwangju Biennale Foundation</p>
15:00 – 15:45	<p><b>Keynote Lecture: Why Associate?</b>  Bartomeu Marí, President, International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art/Director, Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art</p>
15:45 – 16:15	<p><b>Coffee Break</b></p>
16:45 – 18:00	<p><b>Panel Discussion: Institutional Critique – How to be Self-Critical in Biennial Work?</b>  <b>Galit Eilat</b>, Co-Curator, 31<sup>st</sup> Bienal de Sao Paulo  <b>Hedwig Fijen</b>, Director, Manifesta – The European Biennial of Contemporary Art  <b>Geeta Kapur</b>, Art Critic and Curator  <b>Ahmet Ögüt</b>, Artist  <b>Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev</b>, Curator  Moderated by <b>Bige Örer</b>, Director, Istanbul Biennial</p>

18:00	<b>Shuttle Bus to Restaurant</b>
18:30	<b>Dinner</b> Venue: Clärchens Ballhaus Address: Auguststr. 24, 10117 Berlin

**Saturday, 12 July, 2014**

**1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly**

<b>Schedule</b>	<b>Event and Venue</b>
9:30 – 16:30	<b>Reception</b> Venue: Haus der Kulturen der Welt Address: John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10, 10557 Berlin
10:00 – 15:30	<b>1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (IBA members only)</b> Venue: Haus der Kulturen der Welt Address: John-Foster-Dulles-Allee10, 10557 Berlin
15:40	<b>Shuttle bus to KW Institute for Contemporary Art</b>
16:00 – 17:30	<b>1<sup>st</sup> IBA Board Meeting</b> Venue: KW Institute for Contemporary Art Address: Auguststr. 69, 10117 Berlin
17:30 – 19:30	<b>Preview of World Biennial Forum No. 2</b> Venue: ifa Gallery Address: Linienstr. 139/140, 10115 Berlin
20:00	<b>Dinner</b> Venue: Alpenstueck Restaurant Address: Gartenstr. 9, 10115 Berlin

Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2014

8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art

Schedule	Event and Venue
10:30 – 16:00	<b>Visit to the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art</b> <b>Haus am Waldsee</b> Argentinische Allee 30 <b>Museen Dahlem</b> Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Lansstr. 8 <b>KW Institute for Contemporary Art</b> Auguststr. 69 <b>Crash Pad</b> c/o KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Auguststr. 69
10:30	<b>Shuttle bus</b> From Park Inn Hotel To Haus am Waldsee
12:00	<b>Shuttle bus</b> From Haus am Waldsee To Museen Dahlem
14:00	<b>Shuttle bus</b> From Museen Dahlem To KW Institute for Contemporary Art/Crash Pad

## Letter from Yongwoo Lee

Dearest colleagues and friends,

As President of the IBA, and on behalf of all the Board Members, I want to welcome you to Berlin. We are truly pleased to hold our 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly in collaboration with the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, during the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. It's a great pleasure to have you join us for this momentous occasion.

Unlike other art institutions, biennials constantly receive questions as to what we do and why we exist. Why biennials? Why are there so many biennials and what do they do? Is it necessary to keep apart the tasks of biennials in connection with authority? Do biennials merely serve as a marketing tool for the host city? Do they grow together? Are the host cities and biennials mutually beneficial? Are biennials a product of global capitalism? Do they respond to urgent socio-political issues? How will biennials overcome a climate of "biennale fatigue"?

I am truly happy the IBA's 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly is being celebrated in concurrence with the 8<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale. I wish to thank my colleague Gabriele Horn, director of the KW Institute for Contemporary Art and the Berlin Biennale, and her team for co-organizing. I also wish to thank the Kulturstiftung des Bundes for their generous support in organizing today's Conference and General Assembly.

I would like to thank our two keynote speakers, Maria Hlavajova, artistic director at BAK, and Bartomeu Marí, President of CIMAM and director of Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, for sharing their vast experiences in the field, and of course the eight panel members and moderators who are leading our thought-provoking discussions.

Lastly, I would like to thank the diverse constituents who have contributed to this experimental and innovative chapter in the history of biennials and the contemporary art world. And a very special thanks goes to Elke aus dem Moore, director of ifa, and Marieke van Hal, director of the Biennial Foundation. Through the continuous mutual collaboration and network created through this association, the IBA Board, its members and myself have the greatest hope for the future of biennials. Thank you.

Yongwoo Lee  
President of International Biennial Association



## Welcome Speech from Gabriele Horn

Dear ladies and gentlemen, my dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome you all to the public Conference “Why Biennial? Why Associate?” The conference is organized by the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary and Art and takes part on the occasion of the inauguration and the First General Assembly of the International Biennial Association.

“Why Biennial? Why Associate?” is hosted and generously supported by the German Federal Cultural Foundation — represented by Kirsten Haß. A big thank you goes to the German Federal Cultural Foundation and to its directors Alexander Farenholtz and Hortensia Völckers for not only making this event possible, but also for contributing to the global cultural exchange of this event: With this support we could launch a special grant and enable the participation of 26 representatives of biennials, that are located in low-income countries and in emerging market and developing economies.

The idea of creating a stronger professional alliance among biennials was already discussed in 2000 at the first international conference Biennials in Dialogue in Kassel. This conference was initiated by the ifa - Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations), and was followed by four further conferences in Frankfurt am Main in 2002, in Singapore in 2006, in Shanghai in 2008, and in Karlsruhe last February.

Beside these conferences, several small and large-scale events highlighted and shaped the development of a new network of Biennials. But some good ideas need their time to be developed. It was only 2012 at the World Biennial Forum No. 1 *Shifting Gravity*, which took place in Gwangju in South Korea, where we initiated a preparatory committee, an Interim Board, comprised of delegates from twenty-one various biennials and triennials, in order to establish an organization, which we called International Biennial Association.

Several meetings of this Interim Board took place in Sharjah, Venice, Istanbul, and Karlsruhe, covering the structure and key objectives for the future direction of the association. Thanks to the powerful engagement and the enthusiasm of IBA’s Interim President Yongwoo Lee and its interim executive board, Bige Örer and Marieke van Hal as well as of all the other members of the Interim Board, we are finally ready to take off. Yongwoo Lee will welcome you before the second part of today’s conference and

provide a little closer insight into the current work of the IBA.

Biennials with their special, ephemeral format could — on the one hand — give more curatorial and artistic freedom, and could exist rather outside or in between the institutional framework. On the other hand they cannot exist totally independently and free from different interests, as we see in recent history and in current debates. To associate means not only to create a network and to share knowledge, but also to join forces.

We will reflect on the special format of the Biennials with today's public conference and its two panel discussions, which are very much related and openly engaged with the questions "Why Biennial?" and "Why Associate?" and I would like to use this opportunity to thank all speakers and contributors who accepted our invitation to take part in the conference. I am very much looking forward to the speeches, questions, and discussions we will hear today.

A big thank you to the Haus der Kulturen der Welt for having us here and for supporting this event, and the Gwangju Metropolitan City for their kind support provided for the IBA Office.

It is always a great pleasure to work in collaboration with Elke aus dem Moore and the ifa as well as with the Biennial Foundation and Marieke van Hal, who have already organized various Biennial gatherings whole over the world. They again advised this conference with their broad experience, and also organized additional funding for this event, given by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Last but not least a warm thank you goes to the organizers from both: to the team of the International Biennial Association in Gwangju and to our team at the Berlin Biennale.

Gabriele Horn  
Director of KW Institute for Contemporary Art and of the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art

## Welcome Speech from Marieke van Hal

Dearest colleagues,

Thank you Gabriele, the biggest words of thanks go to you for bringing us all together here in Berlin. Thank you and your fantastic team, including Krisztina Hunya and Anke Schleper, for the organization and preparation of these special days, which are important for the further strengthening and professionalization of the biennial field.

Welcome everybody. Welcome to you all in the audience and a special welcome to all of you colleagues that have come from around the world to convene here with support from the Kulturstiftung des Bundes. We're extremely happy you're here with us, and I think it's very important you're here with us. Each of you carries very important experiences and perspectives with you. I also hope you get the chance to meet each other during the breaks, if you didn't get to yesterday, and take this opportunity to exchange ideas with each other.

I'm also happy to be here in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, or, in English, the House of World Cultures, because I think this Haus fits our gathering very well. Migration, globalisation, encounters with different traditions and modernities have changed societies and cultures throughout the world and have created new conditions and sites for artistic production. This is something we recognize in the biennial world extremely well. So thank you to the Haus de Kulturen der Welt for hosting us here.

I have the task to briefly introduce the rationale of the Conference today to you. As Gabriele explained, we have two keynote lectures and two panel discussions. The first keynote address will be given by Maria Hlavajova, and we have posed to her the question: 'Why Biennial?' A seemingly very simple question, but it is not. Somehow, the biennial is constantly confronted with questions about relevance. Somehow, the biennial triggers enormous expectations. Now what does that say about the function and possible functioning of biennials, the engagement in the symbolic value of biennials we apparently have and the way this can be contested in public?

In 2013 and 2014, we have seen a lot of commotion and turmoil among various biennials, including the ones of Istanbul and Sydney, and of course also Manifesta in St. Petersburg. In our second panel discussion later today we will discuss how to be self-critical in our work. Yongwoo Lee, founding director of the Gwangju Biennale and instigator of the establishment of the International Biennial Association will later

introduce the second keynote address by Bartomeu Marí: ‘Why Associate?’ But let’s first start with this morning session.

We have invited Maria Hlavajova, founding artistic director of BAK in Utrecht, the Netherlands, for this keynote address. Maria Hlavajova has been involved with various biennials, including the co-curating of Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana (2000), the curating of the Dutch pavilion in the Venice Biennale (2007), and the initiative of the Roma Pavilion in the Venice Biennale of 2011. She also wrote a seminal text in *The Biennial Reader, An Anthology of Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, titled *How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to the Art Institution*. Maria, I’d like to welcome you.

Marieke van Hal  
Vice President International Biennial Association  
and Founding Director, Biennial Foundation

## **Introduction to “Why Biennial? Why Associate?”**

The Conference “Why Biennial? Why Associate?” was held on July 11 at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt and organized by the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. Hosted and generously supported by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation), the event coincided with the inaugural General Assembly of the International Biennial Association.

The Conference was opened to the public and brought together artists, critics, art historians, curators, and biennial directors who triggered, defined, as well as influenced important developments in the world of perennial art exhibitions. Scheduled in two parts, each consisting of a keynote lecture and a panel discussion, the Conference started with the question “Why Biennial?” leading into the panel discussion of “Biennial Writing-Re-assessing Art History”. In the second half of the program the impetus and prospect of the IBA was addressed through the question “Why Associate?” opening up a wider field for discussion on “Institutional Critique-How to be self-critical in Biennial work”. Other topics raised included how biennials need to respond to social urgencies, local environmental factors and the politics of planning.

The Conference and its distinguished list of speakers drew an audience of 300 people to the hosting Haus der Kulturen der Welt, filling nearly every seat available. The inaugural four-day ceremony of the IBA closed successfully on July 13.

## Speaker Introduction: Keynote Lecture “Why Biennial?”

**Maria Hlavajova** is founding artistic director of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht since 2000, and artistic director of the international collaborative research project FORMER WEST (2008–2016). In 2011, Hlavajova organized the Roma Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, titled *Call the Witness*, and in 2007 she curated *Citizens and Subjects*, the Dutch contribution to the 52nd Venice Biennale. In 2000, she co-curated Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana. She edits and contributes to numerous critical readers and catalogs, and lectures on contemporary art. She is a founding director of the *tranzit* network (with Kathrin Rhomberg), which supports contemporary art practices in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. Hlavajova lives and works in the Netherlands and Slovakia.

### Abstract

Beginning with a diagnosis of the conflict zone that is the world today, Maria Hlavajova’s keynote lecture “Why Biennial?” addressed the urgent need to reevaluate *how* we think about the biennial. Instead of merely positioning the biennial within the history of exhibitions, curatorial concepts, artistic contributions, and event culture, Hlavajova maintained that it is crucial to ask questions about both *how it is governed* and *how it governs*. “As we hear the agonistic voices of artists, activists, and intellectuals intensify these days, from Sydney to St. Petersburg, Istanbul to Bussan, Athens, New York and elsewhere, the biennial itself seems to have become (anew) a vital site of political contestations, though oft times it is its own *politics* that is questioned and questionable,” she argued. And while acknowledging that the turmoil in each of these cases arguably has its own rationale, Hlavajova emphasized that they nevertheless call for continuous, ongoing attention to how the biennial functions as an institution. She proposed that the networked biennial institution *can* become not just a place for distributing the language of contemporary art within global flows of ideas and capital, but one through which to invest in an individual and collective *ethics* as well. This would require a political project of continuous instituting alongside, and in negotiation with, changes in society as well as a recognition of the radically shifting texture of “audiences” towards what she calls *future publics*. These publics are formed alongside the fault lines of global class recompositions, and by placing pressure on the ills of present-day aesthetic and political representation, they are both transformed by—and transform—the times in which we live. To effectively probe the question “Why Biennial?” at this point in history, thus, requires of us to find alternative tools through reciprocity and the mutualizing of spaces, concerns, resources, and competencies with these social actors. Hlavajova regards the

biennial institution as among the best equipped for this task, yet only insofar as it manages to resist dissolution into neoliberal ideology, finding instead ways to constructively combine its *flexibility* in thinking through unorthodox solutions to present-day challenges with its *vigorousness* to push these solutions through.

## **Panel Discussion “Biennial Writing – Re-assessing Art History”**

How do biennials as ephemeral exhibitions take their part in art history? What kinds of histories of the biennials are visible and readable? Is a new reading of art history based on perennial exhibitions possible? Are biennials as a format of the display of art exhausted or is it possible to think about different potentials?

Panel: Bruce Altshuler, Nicolas Bourriaud, Juan A. Gaitán.

Moderator: Koyo Kouoh

### **Introduction by Marieke van Hal**

Welcome to our first panel discussion, titled “Biennial Writing – Re-assessing Art History.” Maria [Hlavajova], I wrote down a quote you used from your professor, “What is a beautiful exhibition in an ugly society?” And I’d like to relate another quote that I wanted to use here as my introduction, by the American art critic, poet and scholar Thomas McEvelley, who passed away last year: “A sensitive exhibition defines a certain moment, embodying attitudes and, often, changes of attitude that reveal, if only by the anxieties they create, the direction in which culture is moving.”

Art history, or rather exhibition history, has taught us that at times when the relationship between artistic desire and political will is under negotiation, opportunities for transformation and new directions in the field of arts are being shaped. It is in this context that we thought it would be important to look back. For our first panel discussion, we thought it would be important to invite colleagues knowledgeable about and opinionated about the position of biennials in art history and the historiography of biennials in general. Koyo Kouoh will moderate this discussion and I’d like to introduce her here.

Koyo Kouoh is the Artistic Director of Raw Material Company, Center for Art, Knowledge and Society in Dakar, Senegal. Koyo served as a curatorial advisor for Documenta 12 and 13, and she co-curated two editions of the Biennale de Bamako, known as Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine (2001 and 2003) in Mali. She has also been involved with the Dak’art Biennale in different capacities, the latest being asked by the Dak’art Biennale to come up with a plan to reform the organization. I leave it up to Koyo to further introduce the talk and our guests.



## Panel Introduction

**Bruce Altshuler** is Director of the Program in Museum Studies at New York University. He is the author of *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002* (2013), *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1863-1959* (2008), *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* (1994) and the monograph *Isamu Noguchi* (1994), and editor of *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (2005). Altshuler has written extensively about modern and contemporary art, including catalog essays for exhibitions organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, Carnegie Museum of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Vitra Design Museum, and Independent Curators International. He has been a member of the graduate faculty of the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies, and the Board of Directors of the International Association of Art Critics/United States Section.

## Abstract

Exhibitions are central points of intersection of the full range of actors and institutions that make up the world of art and culture. And because they involve the interaction of so many individuals and institutions, exhibitions are nodes in structures of agency that ground the construction of a wide variety of narratives, stories that play into diverse personal, cultural, and political histories.

Historically and ideologically, biennials grew out of the international expositions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which were vehicles of national competition carried out through displays of commercial and industrial products. Such expositions led to the creation of large independent art exhibitions as municipalities sought to establish themselves as international cultural centers. The first biennial, established in Venice in 1895, must be seen within this context, as an effort by a city to reinforce its cultural status and to encourage tourism.

Every Venice Biennale intersects with numerous other stories, as we see in Hitler's visit as part of his 1934 trip to Italy, or in the dedication of the 1974 Biennale to "Freedom for Chile" in protest to the recent military coup. And complex narratives punctuate the histories of many biennials: The Sao Paulo Bienal was created so as to displace Rio as Brazil's cultural capital, Documenta was part of the economic reconstruction of Kassel and the moral reintegration of Germany into Europe after the Nazi period, and the Johannesburg Biennial was founded to mark the end of apartheid.

The new biennials of the 1990's were very different than their predecessors, not least in their siting outside Europe and North America. And they reflect developments within general exhibitionary practice, the most important being the organization of exhibitions

around a central theme. This strategy of exhibition-making often is credited to Harald Szeemann, who in Documenta 5 (1972) presented a vast array of artworks around the theme of the social construction of reality through images, establishing the model of the ambitious thematic exhibition that ordered and interpreted artworks according to a grand curatorial conception.

It is the curatorial strategy of unifying exhibitions around themes that raises the problematic of artwork and artist vs. theory and curator. The tension inflects all kinds of “biennial writing”: catalog essays, didactic material posted and disseminated within exhibitions, art criticism and journalism, and subsequent historical analysis. For in writing about a biennial, or presenting public texts to accompany one, all writers must address the central theme in one way or another, relating it to what is displayed, the projects generated, and the exhibition’s cultural, social and political context. Certainly such theoretical and contextual matters were discussed before the ascendancy of the thematic. But they were discussed primarily around the works in the exhibition on a case-by-case basis. They did not frame the entire discussion, as they have done for some time.

**Nicolas Bourriaud** is the Director of École des Beaux-Arts, Paris (ENSBA) since 2011, and currently curator of Tapei Biennial 2014. Together with Jérôme Sans, he was the founding director of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, from 1999 to 2006. He also was Gulbenkian curator for contemporary art at Tate Britain (2007-2009), where he curated the fourth Tate Triennial, entitled *Altermodern*. His major exhibitions include *Traffic* (1996), Moscow Biennial 2003 and 2005, Lyon Biennial 2005, Athens Biennial 2011, and recently *CookBook* (2013).

He founded the contemporary art magazine *Documents sur l'art* in 1992, and worked as a Parisian correspondent for *Flash Art* from 1987 to 1995. His writings have been translated into over 15 languages, including *Radicant* (2009), *Postproduction* (2002), *Formes de vie. L'art moderne et l'invention de soi* (1999), and *Relational Aesthetics* (1998).

**Juan A. Gaitán** is the Curator of the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2014. He is a writer and curator, based in Mexico City and Berlin. Gaitán was curator at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (2009–2010), and adjunct professor in the Curatorial Practice Program at the California College of the Arts (2011–2012). From 2006–2008 he was on the Board of Directors of the Western Front Society, and

worked as external curator at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver. Gaitán writes for several journals, including *Afterall*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Fillip*, and *Mousse*. He is member of the acquisitions committee at FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais in Dunquerque.

## **Moderator**

**Koyo Kouoh** is the artistic director of RAW Material Company, a center for art, knowledge and society in Dakar. She has served as curatorial advisor for documenta 12 and 13, co-curated the biennial *Rencontres de la Photographie Africaine* in Bamako in 2001 and 2003 as well as collaborated in different capacities with the Dakar Biennial from 2000 to 2004. In 2014, she is entrusted by the European Union and the Senegalese Ministry of Culture with the development of a reform for the Dakar Biennial. Her recent projects include *Condition Report on Building Art Institutions in Africa*, a collection of essays resulting from the eponymous symposium held in Dakar in January 2012, *Word!Word?Word! Issa Samb and the undecipherable form*, the first monograph dedicated to the work of seminal Senegalese artist Issa Samb. Besides a sustained theoretical and exhibition program at Raw Material Company, she maintains a dynamic international curatorial activity.

## Speaker Introduction: Keynote Lecture “Why Associate?”

**Bartomeu Marí** is the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA) since 2008. He was Curator at the Fondation pour l'Architecture in Brussels (1989–1993), and Curator at IVAM-Centre Julio González in Valencia (1994–1996). He was the Director of Witte de With, Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (1996–2002). Between 2002 and 2004, Marí was the director of the Centro Internacional de Cultura Contemporánea in Donostia-San Sebastián. In 2002 he co-curated the Taipei Biennial with Chia-chi Jason Wang and in 2004 with James Lingwood the exhibition *Juan Muñoz. La Voz Sola. Esculturas, dibujos y obras para la radio*, at La Casa Encendida, Madrid. In 2005, he was the Curator of the Spanish Pavillion at the 51st Venice Biennial (artist: Antonio Muntadas). Between 2004 and 2008 he worked as Chief Curator at MACBA. Since August 2013 he is the President of CIMAM.

## **Panel Discussion “Institutional Critique – How to Be Self-Critical in Biennial Work”**

How can biennials serve as instruments to open up cultural debates? Can they encourage plurality of diverse opinions and support the right to freedom of artistic expression? How do international/local interests as well as sources of funding influence the decisions about biennials? Is it the right time to be self-critical and incorporate institutional critique into the current debates?

Panel: Galit Eilat, Hedwig Fijen, Geeta Kapur, Ahmet Ögüt, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev  
Moderator: Bige Örer

### **Introduction by Marieke van Hal**

This panel discussion is called “Institutional Critique – How to Be Self-Critical in Biennial Work.” It was interesting to hear from Bartomeu Marí, and his statement on blurring the boundaries between museums, biennials and even art fairs. In many ways I could agree with his statement, however, one could also argue that biennials, at least since the first Havana Biennial in 1984, have been designed as experimental platforms in opposition to museums of contemporary art. Since we are here in Berlin today, I’d also like to briefly refer to the previous edition of the Berlin Biennale, the seventh edition, which was curated by the artist Artur Żmijewski. As you might have learned, either by visiting or by reading about that edition, something was shaken, business didn’t go as usual. And perhaps that is what we should be doing?

Biennials can be improvised and heterotopic sites of dissidence. Biennials can make a variety of unpredictable and transgressive effects possible, effects that exceed whatever brief its initiators may have scripted for. I will keep my introduction very short but I like to introduce Bige Örer as moderator of the next discussion.

Bige Örer has been working at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts - IKSVA, the institution in charge of the Istanbul Biennial, since 2003, and she is the director of the Istanbul Biennial since 2008. Bige Örer carries many years of experience in the making of biennials, and I know that she and the Istanbul Biennial are very self-critical in their work. In fact, the idea for the topic of this panel discussion is hers. I’d like to welcome Bige Örer.

## Panel Introduction

**Galit Eilat** is an independent curator, a writer and the founding director of The Israeli Center for Digital Art in Holon (2001–2010). She was the co-founder and chief editor of *Maarav* — an online arts and culture magazine (2004–2010). Between 2012–2013 she was the President of the Akademie der Künste der Welt. Currently she is co curator of the 31st Sao Paulo biennial.

## Abstract

“We have to put modern Brazilian art in active contact with the rest of the world, and at the same time, try to establish the city of São Paulo as an international art centre,” said Ciccillo Matarazzo, the founder of the São Paulo Bienal in 1951.

In my presentation I will give a brief history of the São Paulo Bienal and the way I and the other curators of the 31<sup>st</sup> edition worked with this historical context and reflected the conditions that we are working with in 2014. The Bienal opened a year after the 2013 winter demonstrations that started around the demands for free public transport and is also the year of the World Cup and the presidential elections.

In 1951, the biennial was founded in the wake of intensified European immigration. Its initial aim was largely to bring modern Western culture to Brazil and Latin America and to insinuate Brazilian artists into the European art system. More than 60 years later, the intention of the Bienal Foundation board is basically the same, even if the rhetoric is different. The gap between rich and poor in Brazil has only slightly shifted in the past few years and the relation between the mass and the elite is based on either fear or charity. The Biennial is a gift that it is in the hands of the extremely affluent and the reaction of the public for the exhibition is expected to be one of gratitude. In general the public is expected to behave in ways that are controlled and sanctioned by the elite.

It is true that in recent years, there has been a reshaping of the core mission of the Bienal and lot more is done to create an educational experience for visitors, especially children. The entrance to the biennial and the extensive educational activities have been made free and visitors can come as many times as they want to see the exhibition or attend a guided tour and symposiums without any admission. Yet the educational activity emphasizes the extraordinariness of the visiting experience. It is a once every 2 year encounter with contemporary visual culture that is presented as exception to daily life. I fear that the size and scale of the Bienal produce a feeling of awe, maybe even of enervation, rather than acts as a call to action. Also, for many São Paulo citizens, free entry is not enough. The Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo is not easy to access with public

transport and the bus ticket is not affordable to everyone, especially for impoverished communities that most of the time living in the city's periphery. In this regard it is useful to recall that one of the triggers for last winter's protests was a government imposed bus fare increase of twenty cents. It should be clear therefore that in a city of 20 million transport is a highly politicized issue, and the Bienal creates conditions of exclusion that are to some extent beyond its control.

As curators, we had to accept much of the basic conditions that are already established in a repeat event. We tried to shift some of the parameters, but we knew from the start that we could only ever be partially successful in terms of widening participation and working for greater inclusion. We tried to work closely with the 200 educators, though there were difficulties in circumventing internal hierarchies that were already in place. We tried to offer agency to cultural activities in the periphery though twice weekly 'Saraus' (open performances of music, poetry, lectures and dance), where people from poorer communities and the indigenous people of the São Paulo region could express themselves directly to the public. We worked with a number of Brazilian artists who are directly concerned with education, transport and social control and sometimes introduced them to international artists who we felt might be compatible. These were our ways of giving voice to other communities than the elite but the steps we took were only a start that would ideally need to go further next time.

**Hedwig Fijen** studied History and History of Art at the University of Amsterdam. Fijen has acted as Director of Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary art, since its origin in Rotterdam in the early nineties. Under Fijen's direction Manifesta has developed into one of the most important large-scale art events in Europe. Fijen is in charge of all aspects of the Manifesta organization including the selection of host cities, thematic content, the curatorial selection and the final execution of the curatorial concept. Before Manifesta, Fijen worked as a curator in the Netherlands, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, Cuba and many other countries. Fijen is currently working the jubilee edition of Manifesta. MANIFESTA 10 will take place 28 June – 31 October 2014 in St. Petersburg, Russia, in partnership with the State Hermitage Museum.

## **Abstract**

Manifesta 10, curated by Kasper König and to take place in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation from 28 June – 31 October 2014 had to survive last two years in a so-called Shakespearean dilemma: *Should we go or should we stay?* Should we leave Russia or should we stay just now when our presence is most needed? This question—about how to disengage or to engage—is not only occupying Manifesta, but also other biennials around the world.

In a press conference on 25 March 2013, during one of the most complex periods Manifesta has ever faced, with its presence in St. Petersburg criticized due to the Russian Federation's annexation of Crimea, I stated:

*“Despite the reactions in the media, Manifesta thinks that there are other ways than calling for a boycott. We are open to all critical statements at large. We would like to offer the opportunity of debating the different positions in an open discussion, now and during the biennial in St Petersburg. This we offer to artists, art critics, opinion makers, of both Russian origin or international background, who, like we, struggle with the dilemma of how a contemporary art biennial with an artistic message should engage openly itself in contested areas where human rights are scattered and criticism is, so-called, not allowed...*

*...Manifesta was born out of a historical moment in time that shifted the geo-political plates that reunited Europe. The ‘cold war’ era created a gap within Europe which held wider political implications globally. It created scepticism, suspicion and for others, curiosity.*

*...We engage in a dialogue with the public and we discuss the relevance of the biennial not only for the artistic community but how this affects the daily lives of the general public. We offer training opportunities for those who are enthusiastic to be involved in a project like Manifesta so the legacy of our work continues after the biennial has gone. We are engaged with those communities that are stigmatized and need solidarity”*

The institutional critique on hosting Manifesta 10 in Russia in 2014 and the many call for boycotts came from different sides. This brought us to the question - how biennials are able to deal with boycotts and use it in a productive way? We, the Russian and international team of Manifesta, the artists and Curator in majority believe that we should be in Russia to respond to the conflicts of our time and the complexities of this specific situation. For the second time the Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, will not take place in the safe haven of the West, but took upon the challenge of confronting the critical contemporary art and the ideas of our time with the collection of the Hermitage and the Russian context at large. We acknowledge that this biennial exhibition represents a specific political momentum and a specific timeframe in Europe.

Biennials like Manifesta should play a vital role in helping critically understand our place in this complex world better. Biennials need to prove to be relevant to today's issues in a conflictions society and engage with a differentiated audience in a critical dialogue that is not just about what they do, but why we do this.



**Geeta Kapur** Delhi-based critic and curator, is a widely anthologized author. Her books include *Contemporary Indian Artists* (1978); *When Was Modernism: essays on contemporary cultural practice in India* (2000); *Ends and Means: critical inscriptions in contemporary art* (forthcoming). She was founder-editor, *Journal of Arts & Ideas*; member advisory council, *Third Text*; Trustee, *Marg*. Curatorial projects include: Indian section, Johannesburg Biennale (1995); co-curation, *Bombay/Mumbai* for Century City, Tate Modern (2001); *subTerrain*, House of World Cultures, Berlin (2003); recently, *Aesthetic Bind*, Chemould: 50, Mumbai (2013–14). She was Jury member at the Venice, Dakar and Sharjah Biennials; member of the Asian Art Council, Guggenheim Museum; Asian Art Archive, Hong Kong; Kochi-Muziris Biennale. A visiting Fellow at several institutes, she lectures in universities and museums worldwide.

## Abstract

### ***To keep the maverick element alive: Biennale as Exhibition, Institution, 'Event'.***

**Geeta Kapur**

1. Peter Burgur <sup>1</sup>, as we know, positioned the avant-garde against what he called Art as Institution. The debate around the spectacle, including mega events (understood by the Situationists to be embedded in the capitalist superstructure) has developed into Institutional Critique conducted in systematic and theatric acts by artists and theorists since the 1960s. The current slew of Biennales provokes both passion and scorn, the latter by those (like the October Group of art historians/ theorists) who see Biennales — distinct from the Museum and the Academy — as spectacles complicit with neo-liberal globalization.

2. The need for advocacy, dialogue and disagreement around the rapidly expanding institution of the Biennales is self-evident. The vantage point from which this is to be conducted is *not* self-evident. I propose that the privilege and procedure of this discourse be less formally constituted; that the transitive and volatile character of new Biennale initiatives be kept alive. *And even their maverick status.*

3. The Biennale is an event in the ordinary sense of the word and also of course a spectacle. If, however, 'event' is understood in the way that it is now theorized, we have a concept from which to educe tropes: the 'event' signifies rupture *and* realignment of the ontological and ethical aspects of the political; it is conceptualized as embodiment of historical conjuncture where the subject (of history) and the world come into a new structural relationship. Appropriately, then, if the Biennale is an event (though minor in

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.)

relation to the historical scale to which new theorization of the ‘event’ applies), it should keep alive the tension between *conjuncture* and *structure*.

4. Does the Biennale phenomena require a supra-institutional form, or a tiered succession of institutions that conduct surveys and build a global database, offer support and formulate critique? The recently founded Biennale Foundation, for instance, critiques (in its major publication, *The Biennale Reader*, 2010 <sup>2</sup>) exhibition practice within the framework of the global economy; yet its organizational ambitions require global funding — a fact that puts many such critical forums in a double bind.

5. Museums are long established state and multi-funded institutions nowhere wanting to be dismantled; they *require* a CIMAM. Associations of art historians and critics extend the discipline by placing the discourse in the public domain. A Biennale, on the other hand, is fully public but not a stable institution and does not, in its discursive potential, observe academic protocol. Global curators are required to be pragmatic and ‘visionary’ at once; this valorized status needs to be deconstructed down to the *politics of practice* — not further consolidated into a meta-discourse within peer-driven institutional structures.

6. Biennale dialogues are perhaps best conducted in symposia at the place of occurrence and in direct reference to live issues within each context. Punctual gestures of affiliations can then be drawn into larger Associations (such as the International Biennale Association/IBA) but not, I would argue, subsumed by yet another global institution. A claim to ‘*networked professionalism, integrity and sovereignty*’ (as stated in the Biennale Foundation brief <sup>3</sup>) seems hasty and even a little portentous: whose sovereignty (what autonomy? whose authority?) and in relation to which culture, polity and populace?

7. Take three available templates. The Venice Biennale is a classical/ conservative structure of expositions, the very status and splendour of which gives the entire world a chance to work with and against historical canonicity; the Documenta is a post-war project for recovering a fractured avant-garde by advancing, in five-yearly iterations, a curatorial wager on the aesthetic and political conjuncture that defines the contemporary; the Sao Paulo Biennale, located in ‘third world’ Brazil, inserted itself very early into the chronology of Biennales and has addresses both, its colonial past and a distinct and complex modernity sustaining (despite decades of dictatorship) a radical hybridity (as

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<sup>2</sup> A recent compendium of positions is collated in *The Biennale Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Ovstebo. (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010.)

<sup>3</sup> [www.biennialfoundation.org/](http://www.biennialfoundation.org/)

for example, Paulo Herkenhoff 's curatorial concept based on 'anthropofagia' for the Sao Paulo Biennale 1998). This makes up the third template that yields a vast outcrop: Havana Biennale, Asia Pacific Triennial, Dakar, Istanbul, Gwangju, Johannesburg, Sharjah, Kochi-Muziris Biennales, and a hundred more.

8. Even as each Biennales enters the global arena, we should look beyond the spectacle and note the classical contradictions of capital, and such other concrete contradictions of place and time that are played out *in situ*. To contextualize this, consider a retroactive 'third world' narrative developed by decolonized democracies with socialist agendas and anti-imperialist strategies: the Bandung Conference (Bandung 1955); the Non-Aligned Movement (Belgrade 1961); the Tricontinental Conference (Havana 1966); the Cultural Revolution in China; Vietnam's victory over US imperialism (1975). These movements recall the decades where an alternative space for cultural politics was envisioned. Far from being nostalgic, this narrative is especially pertinent as the Biennale project has gained ground precisely in the former third world, and along the south-south axis. Can a retroactive definition of alterity still serve a purpose?

9. In a world that is inequitable in terms of material resources and ideologically fraught as between nations and peoples, the Biennale phenomena should demonstrate actually existing (cultural and social) differences. The global economy is unarguably surrendered to the expansionist regime of capital; it is arguably *not* yet homogenized, nor indeed universalized. A UN type parliament of critic-curators to 'sort out' differences may seem agreeable but is by now actually and metaphorically 'out of place'.

10. When a new Biennale starts up in an unlikely nation-space — where there is a weak or absent democracy (Sharjah), or military oppression by a neighbouring State (Riwaq Biennale, Palestine) — a phalanx of enlightened representatives positioned on the high ground of western art institutions are alerted. If circumstances require, these empowered professionals can issue a boycott (*necessary* when the control is fascistic as in the case of Israel over Palestine); protest, if national politics interferes in art matters; and if ideologies ensuing from cultural conditioning turn into censorship. Or, and this is more commendable, they go in as collaborating curators and artists to change and expand the mandate of art from within the given circumstance. Any change brought about in the troubled spot is the more valuable if it produces the confidence to *not mimic* privileged prerogatives of the liberal west but, instead, calibrate, critique and rearticulate these in ways that are radical for the specific place in question. *And, also, a learning experience for western participants.*

11. To take an example: the entire controversy that arose around the 2011 Sharjah Biennale, hinges on the issue of 'reading' social space; more particularly, of under

standing the marked domain of public places and the modes of exposition these 'allow'. As Artistic Director (*not* the functioning curator) of the Sharjah Biennial 2011, Jack Persekian's response to the offence caused to Islam by a particular artwork placed in an open courtyard, was sensitive, judicious and honourable. As in Jerusalem, he had built up in Sharjah an extraordinary space, place and institution for testing ideas around the Arab world in laboratory-like conditions, but also a dialogic forum where the art world engaged with (supported, investigated *and* critiqued) the 'political culture' of West Asia in the context of world politics. This was paradoxically initiated and made possible by Sharjah's royal family. The hard and irreversible decision taken by the same authorities — of removing Persekian from his position — was meant to signal and rectify the offence. Persekian, on his part, refused to ignite the blaze that threatened to engulf the carefully nurtured ground of the Sharjah Biennale, nor to enter the arena alight with protagonists pushing the claim of 'uncompromised' freedom.

12. There are multiple lessons to be drawn from this unhappy episode. Art pushes all boundaries; modern and contemporary art assumes the freedom to offer spectatorial challenge and blunt speech — it famously claims the right to give offence. We inherit and indeed *cherish* this freedom. In more recent decades, however, this mandate has had to be reworked and curators from more 'progressive'/'permissive' societies need to understand what it means to dialogue across widely divergent ideologies.

13. Western neo-liberal democracies, even as they are over-determined by global capital, continue to proclaim Enlightenment values and universal norms in the service of aesthetic autonomy. It now makes for some irony when an international community of curators pitches in with the local struggles of dissident groups — almost too readily and sometimes naively. They would perhaps gain by heeding *micro-shifts* in the strategy of discourse and practice at the site of each Biennale (and not Biennales in general, as if it were already an established / integral institution). The Biennales mostly carry, and not accidentally, place-names as their identifying characteristic.

14. Transcendent notions of artistic sovereignty are no longer workable in local or global situations. As citizens of a world made conscious of civilizational protocol, community rights, and religious feelings (and I deliberately shun the more violent forms of cultural and religious obduracy), we are required to investigate social contradictions and to give this knowledge an imaginative turn. Aesthetic subterfuge born from the stress of contingent choices; strategic and substantial acts of consent and refusal; and sifting out what is conducive, controversial, censored and in *what circumstance* — all this is better suited to test forms of praxis available through art.

15. If battles in and for art are now fought globally, it presupposes the formation of a global citizenry. This is far from a seamless process. Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11, 2002, placed curation within a transnational / transcultural public sphere but not without foregrounding the rupture created by decolonization and the upheaval it produced in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. He has continued to problematize both contemporaneity and curation<sup>4</sup> in this light, recognizing, as well, the subsequent emergence of 'Empire', for which reason we must continue to stress difference — and not only in the shape of cultural markers as in identity politics but at the level of a society's deepest strata: its means and relations of production, its caste, class and race equations and its constitutional and extra constitutional radicalism. This helps us arrive at an agonistic understanding of the very category of the contemporary.

16. In India we are learning to recognise all this. And while our terms of reference are based on constitutional democracy; and while we can openly fight for the right of artists as citizens — to ignite conventions and taboo, defy constraints, fight censorship — we also know that in a social climate that must sustain (in our case) a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and inter-community existence, the artist-citizen who celebrates the spirit of modern and secular freedom must also calibrate, *though never abdicate*, the right of radical transgression in public expositions. This applies as well to artists in nation states where democracy is absent, nascent, desired and struggled for. It is that which has to be nurtured, not an ideologically shaped rhetoric of abstract freedom.

17. My anti neo-liberal and, conversely, anti-fundamentalist position is punctual to India today. In May 2014, the Indian electorate voted in a rightwing government. We will now be dealing with a State committed to centralized control; reckless development via corporatization of peoples' resources; religious and ethnic majoritarianism that promotes fundamentalist passions. Culture and art will be subjected to ersatz values, mean policies and censorship, and these will be carried out in the parliament and by field 'activists' with retrogressive agendas. While the Indian intelligentsia has been committed, by and large, to a left-liberal ideology, an influential percentage of the new Indian middle class, now the largest in the world, despises (Nehruvian and, even more, Marxist) socialism; rejects the idea of the Welfare State; is suspicious of NGO dissidence; and of course sees political resistance as militant insurgencies that must summarily be crushed. It mocks secularism and wants to redefine 'Indian' civilization and culture in superlative terms — as great and 'pure' — but, at the same time,

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<sup>4</sup> Apart from his break-through exhibitions familiar to all of us here, his texts, such as the one reproduced in the *Biennale Reader*, are key to some of what I wish to say. See FN 2.

hawkish and techno-savvy — so that it can lure global finance capital to invest and ‘develop’ the economy on prescribed neo-liberal terms. Predictably, Euroamerican as well as East Asian leaders, looking to their own economic interests, are more than eager to embrace a rightwing demagogue with blood on his hands.

18. Seen from a steep political perspective, it is evident that artists’ (critics and curators) rights are not more precious than citizen rights. Nonetheless, these serve (for us in the art world) as clues to the structure of rights in civil, political and juridical terms. Where it is not so easy to claim art’s absolute autonomy, battles need to be brought into the larger framework of democratic struggle, and by a route that relates the aesthetic to forms of activism.

19. Precisely at this point, I want to introduce caution against euphoric extensions of the Biennale discourse. There is a tendency now to compress the real world into a microcosmic universe of exhibitory positions where curators plot geopolitical upheavals and artists claim world-changing gestures. In dystopic times, there is a compulsion to attribute utopian aspirations to all metaphors that ignite our imagination, including at present the sweeping command of the Biennale phenomena. But although art and aesthetics is indeed where utopias germinate, the exhibitory apparatus is not the only ground where art’s political promise is realized. Further: although the Biennale as an agential structure may have a distributive and democratic, radical and ethical potential, it is *not a political event*; it is unarguably *an art event*. And precisely for that reason, the Biennale apparatus should not be encouraged to swallow up questions of history, contemporaneity and potential praxis. There is some danger of the Biennale as institution and discourse developing a kind of hubris; of indulging in absurd inversion, where the art event throws up a simulacra that obscures, or subsumes, actually existing politics of a given time and place.

20. In the end, I take as example the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in Kerala, India, the second edition of which comes up in December 2014.<sup>5</sup>

a. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) was conceived to compact civilizational and contemporary history in cosmopolitan terms. Muziris, a port town on the Arabian Sea and in the far south of the Indian peninsula, functioned between third century BCE to fifth century CE: trade routes included North African, Arabian, Mesopotamian and Mediterranean lands (including the Roman Empire). In 1341, a ‘deluge’ buried Muziris. Now an important archaeological site, it provides an allegorical frame to the Biennale. Kochi supplanted Muziris as the major port for the region’s spice trade;

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<sup>5</sup> See, *KOCHI MUZIRIS BIENNALE 2012 - India's First Biennale*, catalogue, 2014

it harboured a multi-ethnic population, including races from across the Indian Ocean; and a multi-religious and communitarian ethos with Buddhist, early (Syrian) Christian and Islamic settlements, in conjunction with Hindu kings and colonial cosmopolitans — Portuguese, Dutch and English. In post-Independence India, Kerala installed the first democratically elected Communist (state) government (on and off in power since 1959) with legendary peasant leaders, almost hundred percent literacy and a radical intellectual culture.

b. In 2012, two artist-curators, Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu from Kerala (supported by an improvised foundation and directorate) and backed by the Left Front and, subsequently, the centrist (Congress-led) government, inaugurated the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. Fully international but with ‘third world’ leanings, it had precedents in the Indian Triennale (started in 1968 by a socialist writer, Mulk Raj Anand, belonging to the Bandung ethos, who chaired Delhi’s National Academy of Art; and sketchily prefigured by a putative artist-initiated Delhi Biennale envisioned in 2005-07 but never launched). The first edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale was crisis-ridden: besides the paucity of infrastructure and funds, there were internecine battles between state politicians and bureaucracy and among ideologically opposed artists. Despite or because of this, artist responded to the difficult circumstances with substantive projects exploring place-history, ecology, and acculturating processes from antiquity until today. A distinct aesthetic emerged: (i) Spatially expansive; site-related, contextual, archaeological and archival works; (ii) Mnemonic works engaging historical temporality in allegorical modes; (iii) Works privileging ‘poor’ and lean materiality (after Arte Povera—with artists like Jannis Kounellis and the younger Ernesto Neto included in the actual exhibition); (iv) conceptual, political and discursive works (reinforced with the participation of Alfredo Jaar, Santiago Sierra and Ai WeiWei); (v) A configuration of Indian artists, reputed and young, gained special significance because the Koch-Muziris Biennale was arguably the first occasion when they (many of whom have installed major works in international exhibition) were able to conceptualize and stage their practice on ‘home ground’ — on the geographical and historical terrain of peninsular India. This gave them the vista and the scope for testing new *site imaginaries*.

22. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale of 2012 resembled the Havana Biennale of the 1980s-90s: a place where artists shed their hubris to participate in a collective effort and made meaning with a historically and culturally honed aesthetic. But what now should be a future strategy for KMB? It is dependent on state funding; corporate India; and the art community — a progressive conclave of artists, critics, curators, and an art elite including sympathetic galleries and collectors, but without the sound basis of a developed bourgeois and adequate institutional support for modern art. So while it should be our effort to give this recurrent exhibition/event a viable status and financial

stability, what form of institutionalization should be envisaged and who should be the stake-holders in the project?

23. For those those of us invested in its promise, the big question is: how does a cultural vanguard in its somewhat anarchist gestures come to be positioned within or without the paradigm of the state? As India faces a monstrous nexus between centralized governance, corporate oligarchies and rightwing ideology, can art play a role in supporting democratic structures and forms of resistance within the public sphere? Conceptual rigour and quality of artworks remains a prime priority for any curatorial framework, so how does a fledgling institution like the Koch-Muziris Biennale endorse the elusive and transformative aspects of art practice *and* deploy political intelligence to launch collateral forms of cultural activism? At a practical level, this translates into a struggle to develop the publics of art and this, in fact, is one major criterion KMB is committed to realize. Indeed, public viewing at KMB 2012 was such as to astound artists and elites from India and abroad. Kochi and the KMB put to test the famous educational quotient in Kerala society: you saw many thousands of viewers reading every wall-text with perfect diligence, as if matching one form of (textual) literacy to another – to a visual aesthetic that they will have found coded but evidently also engaging. In the second edition the educational/participational component is greatly enhanced and systematically programmed

24. My argument ends with an unstable conclusion: how to allow the Biennale format to be both maverick and contextual; that is to say *conjunctural*? Which means we conceive of the Biennale as an institution sprung from the uncertainty, promise and antinomies of the contemporary, but firmly hooked to the historical circumstance of its birth. The conjuncture produces discourse and poetics; it asks, on the other hand, for alertness towards emancipatory praxis in fields beyond art. Thus I re-introduce the concept of the avant-garde premised on historical disjuncture and utopic concretion. Even as we know that the Biennale experiment will soon be fully institutionalized, the options around form of institutionalization and its attendant discourse should be kept alive. Why construct the Biennale as an institutional juggernaut to be demolished dutifully by dispassionate scrutiny; why not choose, from the start, a trope that yields anarchic dissensus; why not situate the Biennale in the public domain understood by the very logic of global politics to be not so convivial as agonistic?

**Ahmet Öğüt** is a socio-cultural initiator, mediator, artist, negotiator, and lecturer. Working across a variety of media, Öğüt's solo exhibitions include Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto (2014), Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2012), SALT Beyoglu, Istanbul (2011), The MATRIX Program, UC Berkeley Art Museum (2010), and Kunsthalle Basel



(2008). He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including 8th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2014), Performa 13, New York (2013), 7th Liverpool Biennial (2012), 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011), New Museum Triennial, New York (2009) and 5th Berlin Biennial (2008). Ögüt was recently awarded with the Visible Award for the Silent University. He co-represented Turkey at the 53rd Venice Biennale together with Banu Cennetoğlu (2009).

## **Abstract**

What are the vital parameters for a biennial (institution) to exist *meaningfully* in the current condition? Are biennials assuming the role of pedagogic sites with transformative potential that could have lasting effects on civil society? Or are they part of the neoliberal capitalist idea of “festivalism” that is more concerned about scale, budgets, numbers of visitors, and tactics of branding? Do they prioritize public concerns or are they concerned with profit? Can they act as an intermediary between funding and critical politics, without losing sight of ethical considerations? Do they truly support social struggles instead of whitewashing them? Do they seek out creative strategies and challenging solutions when faced with conflicts and contradictions? Is the biennial about providing a space or *becoming* a space? How does one maintain self-criticality in the face of institutional elitism? How do we avoid confusing cultural heritage with personal conflicts, and distinguish sponsorship from ownership?

We refuse to see biennials only as symbolic manifestations with predefined agendas, and instead plea for their sensitivity to local conditions of working and living. Biennales, which carry ample meaning for the cities in which they take place, need to be aware of the great importance of negotiating and safeguarding sites for the freedom of expression from political manipulation and corporate obstructions. As the 19th Biennale of Sydney, 10th Sharjah Biennial, 13th Istanbul Biennial, Manifesta 10, and many other cases attest, we have embarked into a new phase of biennial history. There is an urgent need for antagonistic and progressive dialogue in order to probe unforeseen possibilities. New institutional protocols must emerge in sync with changes in the nature of spectatorship, sponsorship, usership, and both corporate and government funding. Simultaneously flexible and robust, biennials are not just governed, they also *govern*. As such, they can—and they must—ethically engage in “transforming the arts of governing” (Gerald Raunig), so as to lead a way out of the current impasse, forcing structural changes in patronage, urban transformation, control of public space, and even laws. This task cannot be achieved lest it is guided by the notions of credibility and trust; something for which we must fight uncompromisingly.

*As two of the invited speakers to the conference who share the overlapping concerns, we feel that vital questions on the biennial today —some of which are listed here—are*

*still left unanswered. With this interpellation, we hope to sustain this conversation.*

*Ahmet Öğüt and Maria Hlavajova*

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev** is a curator, author and researcher interested in historical avant-garde and contemporary art. Named 2012's most powerful person in the art world by Art Review's Power 100 listings, Christov-Bakargiev was artistic director of dOCUMENTA(13) from 2008-2012, which took place in Kassel, Germany, and held workshops, seminars and exhibitions in Alexandria, Egypt; Kabul, Afghanistan; and Banff, Canada. Her stewardship of dOCUMENTA(13), considered to be one of the most intellectual and significant exhibitions in the art world, renewed one of the exhibition's primal intentions to enlist culture as an agent of reconstruction, healing and dialogue. Previously she has served as Artistic Director of the 16th Biennale of Sydney (2008) and Chief Curator at the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art (2002-08). Christov-Bakargiev was also a Senior Curator at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center—a MoMa affiliate in New York from 1991-2001. Her books include William Kentridge (1998), Arte Povera (1999), and for dOCUMENTA(13) the 100 Notes–100 Thoughts series as well as The Book of Books (2011–12). Previous group exhibitions include The Moderns, Turin (2003), Faces in the Crowd, London and Turin (2004), Citta' Natura (1997), and Molteplici Culture (1992).

## **Abstract**

On the occasion of the conference, former artistic director of dOCUMENTA (13) and current *drafter* of the 14th Istanbul Biennial, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev read from her recent sms exchanges with artist Anna Boghigian concerning the contradictions between art and power and the inevitable entanglements between art and money. Her poetic intervention broke the conventions of participation in such conferences as this one, inserting an element of intimacy and absurdity to the entire event.

## **Moderator**

**Bige Örer** is the Director of the Istanbul Biennial. She came aboard on the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts in 2003 and worked in the coordination of cultural and artistic projects until she was appointed director to the Istanbul Biennial at the age of 30 in 2008. Since 2009, she has been the advisor of the Turkish Pavilion in the Venice Biennale.

Örer's breadth of activity embraces both the artistic and the academic fields. Together with Fulya Erdemci, she was the co-curator of the *Agoraphobia* exhibition in Berlin, which was a prologue to the 13<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial. Her contribution in various publications includes the research she co-conducted on the financing of international contemporary art biennials. She also teaches at the Istanbul Bilgi University on the subject of managing biennials and international exhibitions.

## **Introduction to the 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly**

The International Biennial Association's 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly was held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. The General Assembly is the association's most important event of the year, and is attended by directors, curators, artists, contemporary art world associations, independent professionals and PhD students from across the globe. The inaugural event drew 89 delegates from over 50 countries.

The IBA serves to be a communicative platform for periodical art events, providing voice for the increasing number of new and small biennials in addition to the established names. As such, the annual General Assembly meets to discuss practical issues facing biennials today and pass motions that will further collaborative initiatives and the exchange of ideas and art practices. It is a unique opportunity to meet with peers and colleagues from varied countries and one of the IBA's most important tenets of operation.

The inaugural General Assembly proved to be a productive meeting, and saw the passage of the IBA's articles and appointment of the Executive Board and Board Members.

# 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly Resolutions

## Resolution No. 1

Establishment of the IBA (International Biennial Association)

Articles of Incorporation “AOI” of the International Biennial Association: Approved

- Section 1: General Rules
- Section 2: Officers
- Section 3: Board
- Section 4: Membership
- Section 5: General Meetings
- Section 6: IBA Office
- Section 7: Finance and Accounting
- Section 8: Supplementary Provisions

## Resolution No. 2

Board Member Transition: Approved

Nineteen interim Board members were approved by majority vote of individual and institutional members whom attended the General Assembly, to transition to become part of the official IBA Board for a term of three years.

1. **Sheikha Hoor Al-Qasimi** – Sharjah Biennial
2. **Elke aus dem Moore** – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen
3. **Donna De Salvo** – Whitney Biennial
4. **Margarita González** – Havana Biennial
5. **Gabriele Horn** – Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art

6. **Hong-hee Kim** – SeMA Biennale Media City Seoul
8. **Yongwoo Lee** – Gwangju Biennale Foundation
9. **Patrick Mudekereza** – Lubumbashi Biennale
10. **Bige Örer** – Istanbul Biennial
11. **Eriko Osaka** – Yokohama Triennale
12. **Mauro Petroni** – Dakar Biennale
13. **Thierry Raspail** – Lyon Biennale
14. **Alya Sebti** – Marrakech Biennale
15. **Alia Swastika** – Jogja Biennale
16. **Sally Tallant** – Liverpool Biennial
17. **Tan Boon Hui** – National Heritage Board, Singapore
18. **Marieke van Hal** – Biennial Foundation
19. **Zhang Qing** – International Biennial Research Center, China

\*List of IBA Board members in alphabetical order.

### **Resolution No. 3**

Executive Board Transition: Approved

The decision for the interim Executive Board to continue their positions was approved by 16 members of the newly transitioned IBA Board.

President – **Yongwoo Lee** (Gwangju Biennale Foundation)

Vice President – **Marieke van Hal** (Biennial Foundation)

Vice President – **Bige Örer** (Istanbul Biennial)

## Photo Gallery



Berlin Biennale, KW Institute for Contemporary Art . Auguststr. 69, 10117 Berlin



Tour of the 8th Berlin Biennale with Juan A. Gaitán, curator of the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art



Preview and opening of *Moshekwa Langa: The Jealous Lover* at ifa Gallery, Berlin

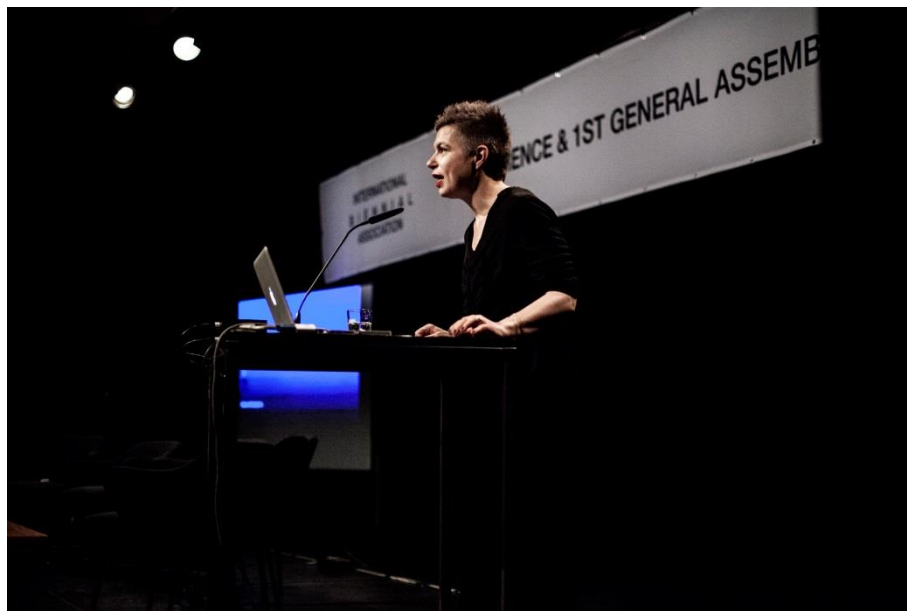


Welcome Banquet at Café Bravo Courtyard





“Why Biennial? Why Associate?” Conference at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin



“Why Biennial” Keynote Lecture by Maria Hlavajova



Panel Discussion “Biennial Writing—Re-assessing Art History”

Left to Right: Moderator: Koyo Kouoh. Panel: Nicolas Bourriaud, Juan A. Gaitán and Bruce Altshuler



“Why Associate” Keynote Lecture by Bartomeu Mari



“Why Biennial? Why Associate?” Conference at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt



Panel Discussion “Institutional Critique—How to be self-critical in biennial work”

Left to Right: Moderator: Bige Örer. Panel: Ahmet Ögüt and Galit Eilat



Left to Right: Hedwig Fijen, Geeta Kapur and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev



Members approved the interim IBA Board to transition into the official IBA Board



Newly positioned IBA Board Members hold an election for the Executive Board

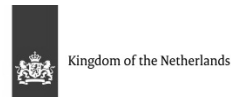
We would like to express our gratitude to the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art for organizing the Conference on the occasion of IBA's General Assembly. To the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (German Federal Cultural Foundation) for generously hosting and supporting the Conference and General Assembly.



In collaboration with ifa - Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen and Biennial Foundation.



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