

Biennials: Prospect and Perspectives

Biennials in dialogue 5

ZKM, Karlsruhe 27.2. – 1.3.2014

Conference report by Misal Adnan Yıldız

Platforms of Exchange or Opportunities for Networks

Misal Adnan Yıldız

A) Introduction

This text aims to develop a reflective base on which to continue the flux of discussions, conversations, and professional exchange of experience that was initiated by the public conference (livestreamed in the internet) entitled “Biennials: Prospect and Perspectives” and held from 27 February to 1 March, 2014 at ZKM_Media Theater. The conference was a collaborative venture by two leading institutions, ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie / Center for Art and Media), Karlsruhe, and ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen / Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations), Stuttgart, both based in the south of Germany and pursuing diverse missions.

This conference can be also seen as an organic form of continuation of the discussion platform that was established by the World Biennial Forum No 1 that took place in Gwangju in 2012. Since then, the perception of biennials and their impact on the circulation of art have changed, in the light of recent events such as Manifesta 10 and the last Sydney Biennial, and this is why the timing of this conference in Karlsruhe crucially promised a potential shift in the discussion.

At the invitation of ZKM and ifa, I was asked to write a report on the input of this three-day conference, which comprised five sessions based on diverse discussions. Instead of writing a “monologue”, my intention is to transmit the plurality of the structure of the conference. This text will include notes from the sessions, conversations held on stage and informal talks, and it will try to give a picture of what was reflected on social media and other platforms.

I will include quotations from artistic and curatorial statements as well as an interview conducted with the curator of the 8th Berlin Biennial, Juan A. Gaitán, in order to create a link within the German context. This open form will take the place of a conclusion to my text.

One of the leading issues that dominate discussions on biennials is evidently the cultural, political and social transformation triggered by globalization. The rise of “biennialisation”, which can be defined as a global trend with biennials popping up in many cities, has been particularly related to the post-capitalist economy, gentrification and the new markets emerging in different parts of the world.

The increasing audience numbers, public and media interest as well as new dynamics such as urbanization, city branding, and the politics of representation were referred to in many contexts that addressed current conditions in artistic production and exhibition making. Most of the speakers preferred to position biennials as a platform of exchange rather than a sole exhibition format, while it seemed inevitable to conclude that biennials still have a direct role in shaping artistic values, art trends and market dynamics. This eclectic form of text development – rather than a report – is my attempt to create a balance between various parties, institutions, curators, artists and visitors.

B) Notes and Reflections from the Conference

The conference was introduced by a keynote lecture by the internationally renowned curator Ute Meta Bauer, who referred to the artists’ petition against the sponsorship agreement between the Sydney Biennial office and Transfield, a private company that was involved in the building and management of overseas detention centres. Some of the participating artists

wrote an open letter demanding that the organization react in the interest of asylum seekers. Ute Meta Bauer was in dialogue with these artists, and her conversation with the Diyarbakir born Kurdish artist Ahmet Ögüt updated the agenda of the conference.

In his personal statement, Ögüt took a macro-level approach. According to the artist, biennales operate as “a unique autonomous pedagogic site to explore ideas freely, to define the level of ethics in the art world without the need to prioritise profit, and to emphatically shape the zeitgeist of art in relation to life and society.” Ögüt went on to show his alarm at the general fact that this position is now in danger: “Biennales cannot avoid their social and ethical responsibilities towards their public, their collaborators and artists when it comes to the source [of] their finances. The case of the Biennale of Sydney is not about asking individual artists to make decisions according to their own understanding and beliefs. This is misleading. If everyone is truly sincere, we cannot abandon one another. I don’t want to address a single target – not the Biennale itself, the sponsor, the artists, nor Australian Citizens in general. All I know is that we should unite in demanding a change to unethical policies. I believe artists can have the most powerful impact, if – and when – they come together and share collective creative ideas in this moment of crisis. Even if only a few artists out of 94 participate, there is still an exhibition. But there would be no exhibition without all 94 artists.”¹

Several days after the conference the Sydney Biennale announced that the chairman of the Sydney Biennale and of its major sponsor Transfield, Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, resigned his position at the Biennale. Moreover all ties with Transfield were cut. As a result the artists who had declared their withdrawal

1. Ahmet Ögüt’s statement is included in Jillian Steinhauer, “Five Artists Officially Withdraw from Sydney Biennale”, in *Hyperallergic*, 26 February 2014, <http://hyperallergic.com/111440/five-artists-withdraw-from-sydney-biennale/>.

from the biennial then decided to participate. This has proved the validity of one of the main arguments that Uta Meta Bauer pushed in her speech, which was to reclaim biennials as forms of artistic territory, taking the decision-making process back from the organizations and the autonomy back from the sponsors.

On the second day of the conference, Elke aus dem Moore, the director of ifa, set the stage with updates on the Sydney Biennial discussion. She read a letter from the organization, defending the independence of biennial content and demanding a separation between artistic content and organizational structure. Elke aus dem Moore also added a local perspective, coming from Melbourne-based academic Nikos Papastergiadis, who briefly argued that the board of the Sydney Biennale consisted of corporate representatives and collectors, with no artist or academic, and not even a critic or a major curator to reflect and respond to wider community interests.²

As an introduction to the sessions, Elke aus dem Moore shared some of the questions she had formulated in her speech, aiming to broaden the perspective on the function of biennials: “Are biennials still places of imagination, places of free discourse or places where surprising new alliances are built, where local neighbourhoods meet an international audience and connections are forged? Can local biennials change something – perspective, behaviours, social or even political situations? Are biennials acting on behalf of or *for* artist communities, an international audience, societies; are they digested – by residents, audience – in an anthropophagic manner, as a cultural strategy proposed by Paulo Herkenhoff for his recently opened museum in Rio de Janeiro, the MAR – the museum as anthropophagic practice? Biennials have a mobility, they offer the fluidity to act, to react, to

2. Nikos Papastergiadis “Transfield and the Board of Sydney Biennale Just Don’t Get It!”, http://www.discipline.net.au/Discipline/Biennale_of_Sydney_2014.html.

muddle through and continuously develop new strategies, cunning, resisting and facing the respective place.”

First Session

In the first session, the main focus was on debates on public space, and how biennials have extended their exhibitions to public space and time in reference to urbanization, gentrification and city politics. The curator of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Fulya Erdemci, presented some images from public protests in Istanbul. The Gezi occupation ran parallel to the biennial: “Gezi had already opened up the conflict and made it public. To collaborate with the authorities would have given them the opportunity to regain their lost prestige and legitimacy after Gezi. This would have led to the instrumentalization of art in favor of the authorities. In order not to collaborate with these authorities, we decided to withdraw from the urban public spaces and to continue the discussion in the exhibition venues. In this way, like John Cage’s silent composition *4’33”*, we aimed to point out presence through absence: by asking the audience to listen to the voices of the streets.”

In her recent text, which will be printed in an upcoming publication within the framework of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Erdemci concluded that the exhibition operated as a form of public domain with an increasing number of visitors: “Some criticized the exhibition for not having taken place in urban public spaces, which they saw as a sign of giving up, a missed opportunity, or not reflecting Gezi more directly. Yet for others, the exhibition articulated, contemplated and complemented the questions posed by Gezi, fully deploying the power of art without appropriating the resistance movement. It certainly opened up a long-awaited debate. Although the biennial withdrew

from urban public spaces to private indoor venues, through intense public interest (we had 337,429 visits in five weeks), the venues themselves became public spaces that people gathered in.”

In relation to this, Yongwoo Lee, representing the tradition of the Gwangju Biennial, presented an overview of its editions under a progression of international curators – including Massimiliano Gioni, Kerry Brougher, Sukwon Chang, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Hou Hanru, Honghee Kim, Yongwoo Lee, Youngchul Lee, Kwangsoo Oh, Wankyung Sung, and Harald Szeemann – mostly located at the 8,100 square meter Biennale Hall in Jungoui Park. The case that was brought to the table by Lee focused on the political history parallel to the establishment of the biennial, and its direct links to urban developments, which attracted approximately 1.4 million visitors in the first editions and operated as an historical example for others.

In comparison with Istanbul and Gwangju, the contextual contrast provided by a presentation by Katja Aßmann, who initiated artistic productions in urban spaces in the Ruhr entitled *Urbane Künste Ruhr* between 2012 to 2014, was very interesting, especially through its network approach, since *Urbane Künste Ruhr* has also brought together already existing cultural networks in the region.

Second Session

The main focus of the second session was the initiating power of biennials in the context of social and political changes. Here, Abdellah Karroum brought in his experience of French-speaking contexts, and discussed how identity, culture and political history influence the perception of biennials by a local audience. Following this discussion on another aspect in the context of the historicity of the city, Gerardo Mosquera, who was an initiator of Havana

Biennial in 1984, was one of the most inspiring figures of the three-day marathon. After the third edition of the biennial and in the face of government pressure on the arts and culture, Mosquera resigned, and was banned for his writing and curatorial activities. His vision and comments on current political transitions were fascinating for the new generation of curators working in the international network. Time was limited for Patrick Mudekereza's passionate statements, but he still had a remarkable impact on the audience through his discussion of the points of departure at the Lubumbashi Biennial, in terms of how literature operated as a fundamental conceptual ground, and of the history of how the city was divided between its black and white populations. Defining where he is located as the "heart of darkness" with a reference to Joseph Conrad, Mudekereza conveyed his experiences of how a location creates a context for exhibition making: "art is good for nothing, but it sure does air out your mind! Waking the spatial imaginary is sometimes simply a matter of clearing one's head."³

Third Session

The third session provided an open platform for curators, artists and organizers to reflect on the form of biennials at different levels, from the personal to the artistic. The day closed with intense discussion. Freelance curator Başak Şenova, who has dealt with emergency zones in her curatorial practice, as at the exhibition UNCOVERED that took place within the Nicosia International Airport project (2010–2013) in Cyprus, and the 2nd edition of

3. Patrick Mudekereza, "His Query Has Continued to Go around in My Own Head", in *Contemporary And*, <http://www.contemporaryand.com/blog/magazines/his-query-has-continued-to-go-around-in-my-own-head-3/>.

Project Biennial D-0 ARK Underground in Bosnia and Herzegovina, gave an intense presentation which resulted in a question as to how biennials release traumatic social, cultural, ethnic and political experience through negotiations, consensus, collaborations, and cathartic moments in organizations. Luchezar Boyadjiev explained his artistic strategies of dealing with different biennial contexts, playing with circulating audiences and their perception as well as their contribution to his practice. Monica Hoff explained the educational approach that was developed for the last edition of the Mercosul Biennial, especially how the artistic projects shaped the conceptual framework of the exhibition and developed a new vocabulary with very diverse audience profiles and event structures. The São Paulo Biennial's Patricia Bonaldi showed that the organization of any biennial is such hard work, requiring dedication from many different levels of involvement and turning teams into families, friends and fellows.

Fourth Session

The ultimate star of the fourth session, which focused on the limitations of marketing strategies and governmental policies, was definitely Kaspar König, who certainly tried to provoke. It was a privilege to hear the story of how Skulptur Projekte Münster started, or his own story of how he ended up curating Manifesta 10. König is a unique personality, with his very own attitude, taste and style. He was accompanied by Nicholas Schafhausen, who recently resigned from the 6th Bucharest Biennial. He did not provide much information about the reasons behind his resignation, explaining the whole story as "escaping from a soap opera". But it was already online that "his decision came following differences of opinion with the event's organisers, Razvan Ion and Eugen Radescu. In contrast to their focus on the international

scene, Schafhausen's aim was to highlight young emerging Romanian artists. He is to be replaced by Gergo Horváth and Stefan Voicu."⁴ Both Schafhausen and König developed a conversation with clear reference to the form of exhibition making as the first concern in their practice – whether it is a biennial, triennial or called something else. König argued that his Manifesta show will be “a queer one due to its nature, especially happening in St. Petersburg, with conceptual, practical and contextual links to the Hermitage, and also – of course – Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky” as a response to the question that concerned most people in the room, given the current situation in Russia and LGBT and other rights. Balancing the stage with their female voices, and similar positions from Liverpool and Istanbul, Sally Tallant and Bige Örer contributed to the discussion with case-study examples from these cities. Compared to Istanbul, Liverpool, Gwangju or Havana, there was a clear difference in the way that the Shanghai Biennial was organized, developed and promoted through fashion, urban culture and new strategies of branding. It seems that König's passion was not enough for some. As an expression of solidarity with the Peace March in Moscow, the artist collective Chto Delat, known for their political gestures on the history of Marxism, withdrew from Manifesta 10. Their reasoning was based on the curatorial approach, which could be briefly summarized as “art over politics”.

Some days after the conference, König reaffirmed his commitment to a group show demonstrating the broadest possible spectrum of art's possibilities, emphasizing that his contract allows artistic freedom – within the limits of Russian law – and that he would (try to) keep the show free of censorship. He restated his dislike for “cheap provocations” with topical political references, warning that Manifesta 10 at the Hermitage could be “misused by political

4. *Art Media Agency*, 11 February 2014, <http://en.artmediaagency.com/80933/nicolaus-schafhausen-resigns-as-curator-of-bucharest-biennale/>.

actors as a platform for their own self-righteous representation”, and insisting that he hopes “to present far more than just commentary on the present political circumstances”.⁵ In late April, König appeared on the stage again – in a press conference in London with his Manifesta team and some members of foundations. He reiterated that his original invitation to participating artists “guarantees artistic freedom, however within Russian law”.⁶

Chto Delat decided to withdraw their participation from the exhibition at the Hermitage and made this statement: “As we have said before, we are generally against boycotts and especially as far as international cultural projects in Russia are concerned. A cultural blockade will only strengthen the position of reactionary forces at a time when the marginalized anti-war movement in Russia so desperately needs solidarity. But our aim at least should be to turn every cultural project into a manifestation of dissent against the Russian government’s policy of violence, repressions, and lies. Even if you are staging Shakespeare or exhibiting Matisse, the task of culture today is to find the artistic language to bring home that simple message.”⁷

In her response to the situation, Joanna Warsza, curator of Manifesta 10’s public program, emphasized the role of commitment in her personal statement published on Facebook: “In this very tense situation with the calls for boycott of the project, while working with the artists, we are confronted with the old political dilemma: engagement or disengagement? As much as we of course clearly and without doubt oppose the Russian military

5. <http://manifesta.org/2014/03/manifesta-10-will-stay-in-st-petersburg>.

6. Jillian Steinhauer, “Manifesta 10 Organizers Defend Biennial in Face of Ongoing Boycott”, in *Hyperallegic*, 1 May 2014, <http://hyperallegic.com/123668/manifesta-10-organizers-defend-biennial-in-face-of-ongoing-boycott/>.

7. “Chto Delat Withdraws from Manifesta 10 (St. Petersburg, Russia)”, in *Artleaks*, 15 March 2014, <http://art-leaks.org/2014/03/15/chts-delat-withdraws-from-manifesta-10-st-petersburg-russia/>.

intervention in Crimea and the position of the Russian government, we also oppose the tone of westocentric superiority and many European double standards, waging a moral struggle of values. This is in fact one of those moments when art really is especially needed if it wants to engage in a critical way with the complexities and conflicts of our time. The projects will obviously not represent the position of the Russian government. I believe that as long as we can work in the complex manner and in the context-responsive way, as long as we – curator, artists, team – are not exposed to the self-censorship, not being intimidated or restricted, we will do so. Especially in this contested time, when one should not set people, and our audiences, equal to their governments and glow with schadenfreude.”

So the Manifesta 10 file has not been closed yet. I strongly recommend the recent book by Vesna Madžoski entitled *De Curatoribus: The Dialectics of Care and Confinement*, about the historicity of the etymological sources of the word “curating, curation, cura”. He also writes about documentas 4 and 5 and Manifesta, the European Biennial, in order to present a broader perspective: “What we should remain alert to are new modes of presenting permanent exclusion in the guise of its false opposition, inclusion.”⁸

Like Chto Delat and Manifesta 10, another artist collective withdrew from another biennial. The Yams Collective, the largest of the eight collectives participating in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, withdrew from the Whitney, objecting to the biennial’s inclusion of Joe Scanlan’s work *Donelle Woolford*, in which a white male Princeton professor “hires black female actresses to play the part of a fictional black artist named Donelle Woolford (the piece has been

8. Vesna Madžoski, *De Curatoribus: The Dialectics of Care and Confinement*, New York and Dresden, 2013.

ongoing since 2005, according to the artist's website)".⁹ This might leave us with a speculative question. Does plurality provide critical thinking more readily than individual positions, or does group identity bring more objections to institutional authorities, curatorial decisions and other forms of authorial positions?

Fifth Session

The last session was designed in search of new directions, looking for alternatives and open spaces. Nevertheless both of the speakers, Leah Gordon and Royce Smith, made it clear in their presentation that their main interest when labeling their projects as "biennials" had something to do with the potential interest that any biennial attracts. With her punk attitude, Ghetto Biennial's Leah Gordon was rather more interested in connecting the diverse artistic, cultural and institutional platforms and positions rather than in just making another biennial, whereas Royce Smith departs from art-historical references that place Paraguay within a global vision of an art canon. Smith attacks the established world of biennials, by switching from a definition of the "peripheral" to the "emerging", and referring to the economy of attention: "Their strength is their uncamouflaged acknowledgement that Western biennials, such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta, and the São Paulo Bienal, or biennials in the non-West that have uncomfortably followed Western traditions (such as the Johannesburg Biennale) have perpetuated untenable tensions between the notoriety of works that are included there and the impossibility of seeing those that are always and already excluded due to the constraints of time, geography, financial resources, or curatorial inclination. Their response has been the formation of an ideological, quasi-anti-

9. Mostefa Heddaya, "Artist Collective Withdraws from Whitney Biennial", in *Hyperallegic*, 14 May 2014, <http://hyperallegic.com/126420/artist-collective-withdraws-from-whitney-biennial/>.

institutional mission to transcend the limitations of site-specific exhibition by drawing greater attention to artists, audiences, and changing ideas that no longer fit such a rigid, site-specific museological paradigm. For these emerging biennial traditions and the changing conditions they attempt to chronicle, the expansion of creative, postmodern art discourse cannot be accomplished by expanding the exhibition traditions that speak to a select few; rather, such tectonic changes are accomplished by increasing the sizes of audiences who interact with contemporary art and, with them, help to make art more relevant to local and global communities.”¹⁰

Leah Gordon prefers to focus on her own geopolitical context. As she said, the Ghetto Biennial gradually changed its mission: “Many of the visiting artists attracted to the Ghetto Biennale have quite anarchistic, anti-authorial, non-material practices. This is what led to the challenging paradox at the heart of the 1st Ghetto Biennale. There was a very wide gap between the projections of the visiting artists and the expectations of the Haitian artists. The Haitians were at first a little disappointed with these Western artists who arrived wanting to ‘dismantle global power systems, centres of art production, and cultural transmission’ and such like. Many of the visiting artists critiqued the current locus of global art power that most of the Haitian artists were desperate to plug themselves right into. So whilst many of the visiting artists were exploring non-commercial, indistinctly authored, dematerialised works, the Haitian artists were making art objects that they, unfashionably, wanted to sell. This dynamic tension at the heart of the Ghetto Biennale was illuminating for both the visiting and hosting artists.”¹¹

10. Royce W. Smith, “Too Big to Fail?: Excess, Crisis, and the Contemporary Mega-Exhibition”, in *Aica Paraguay*, <http://www.aica-paraguay.com/2012/11/22/royce-w-smith/?lang=en>.

11. “The Biennial Questionnaire: Leah Gordon”, in *ArtReview*, http://artreview.com/previews/the_biennial_questionnaire_leah_gordon/.

C) Instead of a Conclusion, a Conversation about the Bright Future

Over recent days, while I was trying to sum up this text as something that could be interesting to read and discuss just before the opening of the 8th Berlin Biennial, especially in relation to the German context and with other news popping up from different parts of the world, it seemed necessary to stop looking for a conclusion.

It seems that the definition of an exhibition given by the artistic director of dOCUMENTA 13, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, will return as the formulation of another biennial structure: "An exhibition is always the act of locating art works and bodies producing an understanding of the role of partiality, of the importance of engaging with a site, and, at the same time, producing a polylogue with other spaces."¹² The 14th Istanbul Biennial (5 September – 1 November 2015) will be drafted by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev with a number of alliances. A recently circulated statement reads: "The Istanbul Biennial will embark looking for where to draw the line, to withdraw, to draw upon, and to draw out. It will do so offshore, on the flat surfaces with our fingertips but also in the depths, underwater, before the enfolded encoding unfolds."¹³ Bringing her collaborations from the dOCUMENTA 13 experience, Bakargiev definitely promises a continuation on the issues she touched on in her edition, such as the complex relationships between topology, learning and science. This gives rise to another critical question. Is the next Istanbul

12. *Das Begleitbuch / The Guidebook (dOCUMENTA 13 Katalog / Catalog 3 / 3)*, Ostfildern-Ruit 2012, p. 7.

13. Biennial Foundation, <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/2014/05/the-14th-istanbul-biennial-organized-by-the-istanbul-foundation-for-culture-and-arts-will-be-drafted-by-carolyn-christov-bakargiev-with-a-number-of-alliances/>.

Biennial going to look like a mini-dOCUMENTA 13 show?

At this point, it might be interesting to sum up our discussion focusing on how biennials function today at diverse operational levels from pedagogy to city branding, from marketing to social transformation. As forms of exhibition, biennials are also becoming more and more institutional, as primary institutions of art marketing; and they are definitely losing their experimental positions. They start to look more and more look like art fairs, which are in turn beginning to adapt discursive programs from the biennial agendas. As a footnote here, residencies or workshop-based traveling programs could not have satisfied the needs of the art market with their long-term forms of organization, even though for a while they retained their positions as places where institutions, curators and artists can still afford risk, experimentation and failure.

The term, “circulationism” has been proposed by Hito Steyerl for understanding the contemporary potential of art and its image today, in her recent book *Too Much World*. She defines a new paradigm – a space of no return – as a “free-flowing system of ‘circulation’ that circumscribes and influences everything from government to love.”¹⁴ Looking at the main role of the biennials, as the meeting point for the recent discussions, research and productions in art, this term might help to develop a new basis for speculating about their future positions and functions.

Back to the conference at Karlsruhe, I would like to mention here the artistic gesture of Hamburg-based Christoph Schäfer, who is actively involved with Gezi Park Fiction in Hamburg and witnessed the political transitions in Istanbul last year during the preparation of his contribution to the 13th

14. See

[http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/detail/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1\[ptype\]=18&tx_vabdisplay_pi1\[project\]=1264](http://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/detail/?tx_vabdisplay_pi1[ptype]=18&tx_vabdisplay_pi1[project]=1264). See also Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World: The Films of Hito Steyerl*, edited by Nick Aikens, Berlin 2014.

Istanbul Biennial. As one of the guest speakers in the first session, he showed what he was drawing while the other speakers were presenting their work. Taking photos of his drawings and uploading them to the computer that was connected to the projector in the room, he talked about the abstracted form of space as a point for imagination, inspiration and conception with reference to Gothic churches, Istanbul streets and German villages.

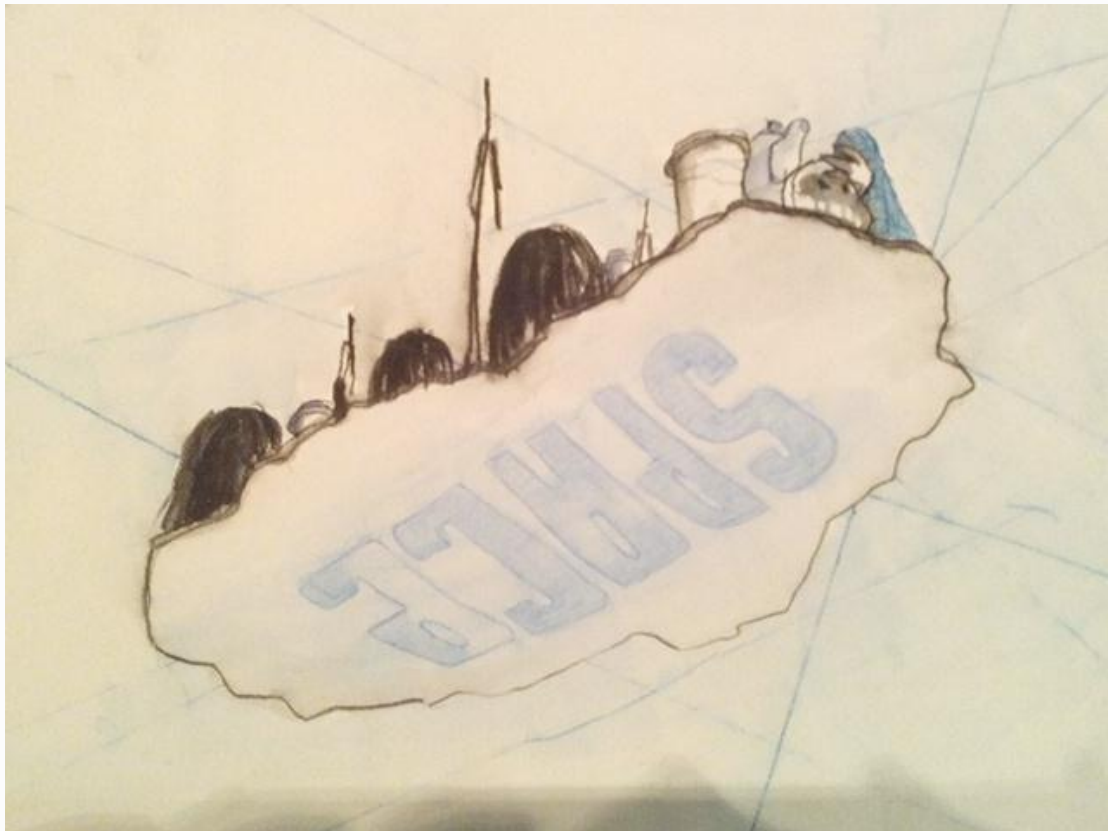


Courtesy of the artist Christoph Schäfer www.christophschaefer.net

This is where I would like to stop. That gesture communicates with me directly about one clear point that we as curators, cultural producers and representatives of art institutions are still responsible for. We are responsible for providing possible forms of collaboration, proper conditions and open structures for artists to develop their research and produce their work. Without artworks, and artists, there is no exhibition, no biennial or curator.



Courtesy of the artist Christoph Schäfer www.christophschaefer.net



Courtesy of the artist Christoph Schäfer www.christophschaefer.net

D) An Interview with Juan A. Gaitán, Curator, 8th Berlin Biennial

To trigger a further discussion on all these points, I invited Juan A Gaitán for an interview concerning what seemed urgent to me in my writing process. I am grateful to him and all the contributors, as well as the ifa and the ZKM teams for their patience.

Misal Adnan Yıldız: I am curious about the 8th Berlin Biennial especially due to its positioning of artistic practices and young curatorial experiences as part of its decision-making process. When you were considering the chain of collaboration, what was first, second and third on your priority list?

Juan A. Gaitán: I am not sure I can speak of priority lists, as it's not really how I work, but I can say that the first two things were to find a way of approaching Berlin that wasn't about interpreting it as a city, but rather about seeing it as an example of larger metropolitan tendencies, and to simultaneously leave things open enough to be able to invite artists coming from different points of view and practices. In this way, each invitation to participate in the biennale was also an invitation to challenge the curatorial framework and force it to develop further.

Misal Adnan Yıldız: During the conference on "biennials" – organised by ZKM and ifa – there was a clear consensus on how biennials operate today, and mostly the term platform was used. I raised a question of reconsidering them still in terms of exhibitions as an urgent requirement of our practice. How would you comment on this discussion in relation to your own working process?

Juan A. Gaitán: I think the primary and principal aim of a biennale is the exhibition, it is also what visitors come to see first, so every other aspect surrounds this primary function of the contemporary art biennial. With that in mind, we have developed our parallel program in two ways, one which begins with the works and the artists, and another which is aimed at opening up the biennial to the city's cultural field and using the biennial in order to suggest that different institutions can establish associations, even if these are temporary.

Misal Adnan Yıldız: At which level are the map of venues and lists of artists interrelated with each other? Or let me rephrase it, where do you start with the application of conception? What comes first for you when you develop a conceptual ground: context, space, concept or artists? How would your curatorial approach follow its characteristic pattern in a biennial context? Is it different to make a biennial, or the same like any show?

Juan A. Gaitán: I actually haven't been concerned with making a statement about how biennials behave and presenting this one as a corrective. Yet, in terms of the first part of your question – and in relation to my answer to your first question here – I have developed two parallel processes. One is curatorial and relates to the framework, and the other is the exhibition, which relates to the artworks themselves. The works don't need to relate to the venues, because the venues are part of the curatorial framework, which is constructed as we go along, in my dialogues with the artists and in our way of understanding the city and so on, and this is there to hold the process and the biennial together. The works are developed independently, and the concern on my part is with how they are put on display and not how they might illustrate the curatorial process.

Misal Adnan Yıldız: Where do you see the Berlin Biennial in the history or agenda of biennials? Do you think it now has a certain tradition in the development of discussion, or does it have a character?

Juan A. Gaitán: I think it is a generous and flexible biennial, which is designed to give the curator or curators as much freedom as possible to develop something. This is quite important I think, and it is something that is safeguarded by the biennial itself. I also think it is one of the most important ones in terms of being able to develop a discourse or discussion, and for this same reason it develops with each edition.