

2017: 6). Two of the papers presented in Uganda were published in *African Arts* vol. 51, no. 2 (2018), while three more articles appear in this volume.

4 Other Ugandan participants included Rose Namubiru Kirumira, Philip Kwesiga, Annette Sebba, Justine Nabbagala, Sarah Nakisanze, Joan Kekimuri, Dorah Kasozi, Margaret Nagawa, and Edward Nobel Bisamunyu. South African scholars included Ruth Simbao, Rachael Baasch, and Amanda Hlengwa from Rhodes University and Mduduzi Xakaza from the Durban Art Gallery. Scholars from Nigeria included Ganiyu Jimoh from the University of Lagos, and Tayo Ijisakin and Stephen Folaránmí from Obafemi Awólówọ́ University Ile-Ife.

5 The blaxTARLINES is an art incubator at the Fine Art Department of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, and the 2018 PROSPA participants included kàrì'kàchà seid'ou, Kwaku Bofo Kissiedu, George Ampratwum, Edwin Bodjawah, Dorothy Amenuke, and Ibrahim Mahama. The group of nine scholars and artists met to discuss a forthcoming special issue of *African Arts* that will consider collaborative practices in art departments on the African continent, with a particular focus on the work of blaxTARLINES (<https://www.facebook.com/blaxtarlineskumasi/posts/2212743442181214>)

6 Personal correspondence with Nadine Siebert, Deputy Director Iwalewa Haus, University of Bayreuth Germany. November 10 and 15, 2018.

7 Personal correspondence with Ganiyu Jimoh, October 27, 2018.

8 Personal correspondence with Tolulope Sobowale, October 25, 2018.

9 Personal correspondence with Peju Layiwola, October 27, 2018.

10 The first edition of the Art Expo in Nigeria took place from August 27–31, 2008. It started as a collaborative engagement between the government-funded National Gallery of Art, which is a parastatal under the Ministry of Culture with private galleries in Nigeria. One mission of the Art Expo was to create an international platform for Nigerian artists and foster a relationship with other African and international artists. The second edition of the Art Expo took place from August 22–30, 2009.

11 ARESUVA was the brainchild of the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria–NGA. The first edition in which I participated was held in August 2008 at the

International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria, while the second and last edition was held in 2009. It brought together artists and scholars from Africa and the Diaspora to participate in an exhibition and symposium on the art of Africa.

12 Lagos Photo, founded by Azu Nwagbogu and organized by the African Artists Foundation, was launched in October 2010 and opened to the public on October 25, 2014. Unlike ARESUVA and Art Expo, Lagos Photo had been consistent with its programs and events and has turned out to be one of the international events that artists in Africa and beyond look forward to annually.

13 About forty-one artists reflecting diverse background and countries, genres, and practices participated for the duration of the Lagos Biennale. The narrative of the biennial further shares its title with the 2012 project of Mozambican artist Mário Macilau; this, the organizers say, was expanded to accommodate the geographical, spiritual, and most importantly, the psychological ramifications of living on the edge. Artists from different parts of Africa and the diaspora participated in the 2017 Biennale, with series of workshops, live shows, video screenings, and performances. See Folakunle Oshun, artistic director of the Lagos Biennale 2017 (<https://www.lagos-biennial.org/biennial-2017>).

14 Bisi Silva is a Nigerian contemporary art curator based in Lagos. She is the founder and artistic director of the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Yaba Lagos.

15 <https://artxlagos.com/art-x-talks-page/>

16 Women on Aeroplanes is a research-based project curated by Annett Busch, Marie-Hélène Gutberlet, and Magda Lipska, coproduced by Iwalewahaus, Universität Bayreuth, funded by the TURN Fund of the German Federal Cultural Foundation in collaboration with Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos / Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw / The Showroom, London.

17 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/artsloungeafrica>

18 <https://www.ru.ac.za/fineart/latestnews/launchof-newgalleryandsarchiartslounge.html>

19 The participating artists in the *Converge* exhibition were Bernard Akoi-Jackson (Ghana), Jelili Atiku (Nigeria), Moffat Takadiwa (Zimbabwe), Rachel Baach (South Africa), Rehema Chachage (Tanzania), Stacey Gillian (Uganda), Stary Mwaba (Zambia), Natasha Bezuidenhout (South Africa), Wallen Mapondera (Zimbabwe), Sonwabiso Ngcai (South Africa), Samkela Stamper (South Africa), Gladys Kalichini (Zambia), and Dylan McGarry (South Africa).

20 *Converge* curatorial statement.

21 The 1820 Settlers Monument is in the process of changing its name from Grahamstown to Makhanda.

22 The Shona and Bemba proverbs in this paper were shared with me on November 9, 2018 by Baranabas Muvhuti (Shona-Zimbabwe) and Andrew Mulenga (Bemba-Zambia), both are PhD candidates at Rhodes University, Makhanda (Grahamstown).

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## dialogue

### Biennials: Who's in and Who's out?

by Joseph L. Underwood

Who's in and who's out? Central or peripheral? Market-driven tourism or anti-institutional experiment? The biggest mistake in analyzing the tangled network of biennials would be to simplify their motives and effects into such reductive binaries. Biennials are notoriously layered events, with many pop-up, OFF, collateral, or dissident exhibition projects taking place in tandem with the official event structured by the government, museum, foundation, or private patron. Biennials eschew facile categorization, and a single edition in a particular city can make great strides in connecting regional artists to larger currents of influence, even as it promotes a self-deprecating anachronism in the name of identity-building. As a structure,

the biennial is an unnerving, unwieldy hydra ... and who would want it any other way?

Long before the so-called globalization of the art world in the late 1980s, biennials offered a space for artists from colonial and capitalist regions to come into dialogue with creators from the Non-Aligned and Global South spheres. For instance, although the Bienal de São Paulo was founded in 1951 with the aim of joining the ranks of avant-garde art-makers—Venice, Paris, New York—some of its earliest editions feature an impressive confluence of nations. The 1961 edition saw Antilles, Cuba, India, Nigeria, Senegal, Turkey, United Arab Republic, and Vietnam exhibit alongside the more established art world players. Or, if we approach it from the perspective of a single country, artists from Senegal participated in four editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, two editions of the Biennale des Jeunes Artistes (Paris), and one edition of the Ljubljana Graphic Art Biennial (Yugoslavia) between 1963 and 1981, before the "global turn."

The fact that biennials don't even necessarily follow their own self-proscribed biannual nature—i.e., Havana and Marrakech just canceled their 2018 edition but will ostensibly rise again—demonstrates how reflexive, or capricious, such "institutions" are. Although some decry the "superficiality" and "structural amnesia" of biennials for their high turnover in organizing staff, this whimsy and unpredictability is generative and compelling. Are we to pretend that a wave of banality doesn't also plague the exhibition makers at museums? At least with biennials the local art scene doesn't languish for decades while waiting for the retirement of a certain curator or director. The Liverpool Biennial could flop one year, then return as a tour de force two years later. And with the compendium of global biennials, with almost as many models for organization and geographic integration, a savvy curator can draw from the model of Gwangju or Sharjah or Mercosul without feeling so limited as to reiterate precisely what was done before in her locale.

The challenge is no longer being inclusive or global in scope—by now, these ephemeral exhibitions gleefully include a handful of African artists, Latinx artists, etc. As Okwui Enwezor observed over a decade ago, what fails in their global aims is how they display “art that has been formerly peripheralized” without a conscientiousness of what is lost when de/re-contextualized for the itinerant museo-collector-gallerina glitterati. Even if the organizers are conscientious, how can we hold the public accountable to bring this sensitivity—namely, “the will to understand these local practices for what they mean in their own cultural spaces”—to the exhibition? And yet how much can we really ask from an audience? Will they really be able to visit Shanghai and encounter works created in Lahore, Mogadishu, and Montevideo, and approach each installation with even basic cultural familiarity? With few exceptions, a biennial with aspirations of garnering a global audience defaults to modes of display and communication that favor a Euro-American expectation, or what Fillitz termed “umbrella.”

Any useful analyses on biennialism—like any good art historical studies—require us to delve into particularisms. Depending on the city and the specific edition, a biennial can sustain art world status quo, provide new meeting grounds, or eschew hegemonic systems ... and then do the opposite two years later.

*Joseph L. Underwood is an assistant professor of art history at Kent State University whose research focuses on exhibition platforms used by artists from Senegal to create transnational networks of influence since the mid-twentieth century. JUnder18@Kent.edu*

## Biennials' Temporality

by Maureen Murphy

Paris, October 31, 2018. Coming out of the symposium Zoë Strother and I organized on Biennale Cultures in Africa at Columbia University in 2015, one student wondered: “So, France and the European Union financially support biennales in Africa. What’s wrong with that?” At the time, the question nagged me, as it captured the contradictions of the debate in one straightforward question. The present dialogue will give me the opportunity to tackle an issue so central to the understanding of the diffusion of biennales in Africa, often accused of representing a mere showcase for the West disconnected from local realities and even local artists (Senegalese artists have often complained that they felt dispossessed from a biennale they had contributed to create). If relying on foreign funding does not necessarily mean a loss of artistic and cultural independence, a balance must be found to create an event that would both benefit the local and connect with the global.

Of course, biennales are the sign of a

widespread neoliberal model originating in the West and strongly supported by France and other previously colonizing countries. The history of its emergence is telling: Conceived on the model of a universal exhibition, the first artistic biennale was created in Venice, Italy, in 1895 and gathered together different national pavilions that are in part still visible in the Giardini today. African art was first displayed in Venice in 1922, and it was presented (no surprise for the 1920s) as “primitive.” If the model of the biennale as we know it today really began in the 1980s, I would situate the roots of African biennales in the pan-African festivals organized in the 1960s and 1970s: the World Festival of Negro Art (Dakar, 1966), the Panafrican Festival (Algiers, 1969), or the African Festival of Arts and Culture (Lagos, 1977). Conceived as celebrations of independence and platforms for anticolonial positions, these events were meant to foster debates about race and politics, promote the art produced on the continent, increase knowledge, and diffuse it both locally and internationally. They were supported by nation-states and led to profound urban changes in the cities where they took place, as well as to the construction of cultural infrastructures.

The second generation of biennales dates from the mid-1980s/1990s, the most famous and longest lasting one being Dak’art in Senegal (1990), but one should also mention the Bantu biennale that took place for the first time in 1985 as part of the Gabonese presidential project to create a set of events aimed at promoting Bantu cultures. Diverse, eclectic, and heterogeneous, biennales developed according to very different agendas. In the light of such a history, the term “biennale” functions as an empty shell. A common feature nevertheless ties those events together: the fact that they were often organized as a way out of an economic, political, or cultural crisis. Take the first Johannesburg biennale in 1995, for instance. It symbolically celebrated the end of apartheid and was successful in associating local curators and artists with international actors. The second edition (1997) was totally different. The curator, Okwui Enwezor, decided to get rid of national pavilions and to focus on “contact zones” and exchanges, rather than on national specificities and differences. He defended a vision of the global that was perceived (especially in black communities) as intrusive and disconnected from local realities and aesthetics. But to nuance Bouna Medoune Seye’s opinion that biennales do not benefit the artists, one has to keep in mind the fact that most biennales from the second and third generation were created by artists themselves (Diba 2018: 150): Dak’art, for instance, was born out of the Senegalese National Association of Artists, which started organizing national “salons” in the musée dynamique in 1985 in order to display the work of local

artists at a time when the nation state was withdrawing from cultural affairs. Reacting against the first generation of “salons” and exhibitions organized by L.S. Senghor in the 1970s during which the State was omnipresent and omnipotent, artists-organizers sought to organize exhibitions that would promote local artists connected to local realities, as well as to the public (Sow Huchard, 1989: 75–76).

The third generation of biennales would correspond to the ones created around the year 2000 in the context of an increasing globalization of the international artistic scene. To mention a few: the Lubumbashi Biennale in DRC Congo (since 2005), or the biennale in Benin (2010 and 2012). Whereas the first generation of festivals were supported by the nation-state and had pan-African ambitions, this last generation tends to emanate from private initiatives, whether they be cultural operators or artists, and are often meant to compensate for a lack of infrastructure. As these events seem to have become the new platform through which contemporary art gains recognition, artists who have earned international reputations launch not only their own art centers locally but also biennales. More vulnerable than their predecessors, they tend to disappear after two or three editions. This last point brings us back to the opening question about how important it is for biennales to remain both financially and politically autonomous. Even if biennales “have to be constantly reinvented with new curators,” I would disagree with Pascal Gielen, who states that their ephemerality is a sign of their “superficiality” and “amnesia.” In my opinion, the real risk lies in their institutionalization and “instrumentalization” by those in charge. Dak’art has been directed by the same curator these last two editions, and the Bamako photographic biennale was long the production of the same team managed from Paris. Biennales are an opportunity for the cities that welcome them. Let us hope, with Ugochukwu Smooth Nzewi, that “in time the construction of value for African art could become home-grown” and that biennales will participate in the fostering of a constellation of cultural initiatives that will able local artists to get better known, locally as well as internationally.

*MAUREEN MURPHY is an art historian and associate professor at the University Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. Her research focus on transnational modernisms, the history of exhibitions, and contemporary African art. maureen.murphy.1@gmail.com*

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