Collecting to Serve the Needs of the 21st Century Art Patron

Outside the Boundaries: Contemporary Art and Global Biennials

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Worldwide Art Books
Academic Programs in Contemporary Art

- An increasing number of academic research libraries are now serving art history departments who teach contemporary art at the doctoral level.
- The faculty and students need materials to suit their teaching and research needs.
- Many of these programs are global in scope, as is the contemporary art world.
- Presents challenges for collection development.
- I will focus on “biennial” exhibition catalogs.
A Very Brief History of Biennials

- 1895 – Venice Biennale
- 1896 – Carnegie International (Pittsburgh)
- 1955 – Documenta, Kassel Germany (to counter the Nazi branding of modern German art as “degenerate” and help a war-ravaged city reclaim a place in modern culture – A quintennial exhibition.
- 1970s – Bienal Internacional de Saõ Paulo, Brazil & Biennale de Sydney
- A boom in biennials during the 1980s & 1990s
Biennials in 1980s and 1990s

- These exhibitions are found primarily outside Western Europe and North America
- Bienal de la Habana, 1983
- Istanbul, Turkey – 1987
- Dak’Art (Dakar, Senegal, French language), 1989
- Cetinje Biennale (Montenegro, The Balkans) and Biennale Lyon (France) - 1991
- Asia Pacific Triennial (Australia) & Sharjah (United Arab Emirates) – 1993
- Shanghai - 1994
- Gwangju, South Korea – 1995
- Manifesta, the European Biennial for Contemporary Art – located in different regions of Europe – 1996
Biennials in the 21st Century

- Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial, Japan & Tate Triennial – 2000
- Yokohama, Japan, Tirana (Albania) & Valencia - 2001
- Tirana, Albania – 2001
- Athens, Ceará América (Brazil – discontinued) Taipai and Guangzhou, China – 2002
- Beijing and Prague - 2003
- Moscow, Bucharest & Torino – 2005
- Singapore – 2006
- Thessaloniki - 2007
- Brussels – 2008
- The Generational, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY - 2009
A New Triennial by a Museum

- **The Generational** – New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC – 2009
- Two iterations:
  - Younger Than Jesus, 2009
  - Ungovernables, 2012
- Focuses on very young artists that are not yet exhibited in other internationals
- Both include a directory of young artists in addition to an exhibition catalog
Will a Biennial Continue?

- Some have closed: most notably Johannesburg
- *People’s Biennial 2010: A Guide to America’s Most Amazing Artists* (2011) – Independent Curators International – A traveling exhibition that focuses on local artists in cities that are not in the normal biennial circuit
- Title in homage to Howard Zinn’s classic book *A People’s History of the United States* (1980) which speaks about the history of the US from the perspective of the excluded.
- Cities and artists outside established art circles
- Should be held and published this year
- It remains to be seen if this will continue
Parody of a Biennial!

- 6th Caribbean Biennial (2001)
- A “false biennial” curated by provacuteur and the “bad boy” of contemporary art, Maurizio Cattelan,
- It offered ten chosen artists a one-week vacation at the Golden Lemon Resort on St. Kitts with no art and no work to do.
- Artists gathered but did not create art or interact with local artists. The catalog includes photographs by Armin Linke and essays on art, activities, St. Kitts, and the concept of biennial conferences.
- It was “institutional critique” in biennial drag.
- And took aim at the boom in biennials.
Why the Global Explosion of Biennials?

- This happened due to collapse of Cold War era boundaries with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and break-up of the USSR into separate countries.
- Our global economy has decentralized the art world just as it has the globe’s economy.
- The development of technology allow us to be transported through time and space / linguistic and cultural borders.
- In some cases, we can view exhibitions online and watch video clips of some of the biennials.
What We Learn from Biennials

- The recent biennials were created to celebrate new trends in the art world and examine other issues in relation to the art: post-colonialism, displacement, migration, trans-nationalism, race, urbanization, the environment and other pressing global issues.
- Some are para-political events while others bolster tourism.
- Whatever the city’s agenda, biennials feature works by emerging artists and bring different artists’ and curators’ voices into the international arena.
What We Learn from Biennials, cont. 

- In continents such as Africa, Asia, Australia, promote artists that Westerners would not otherwise see.
- Now include symposia, seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, panels, festivals, performances.
- Some now include separate “Design Biennials”
- Provide detailed, sometimes archived web sites.
Biennial Exhibition Catalogs in the Library Collection

• The history of art and taste in the 21st century is being written from one biennial exhibition to another.

• These publications are critical for graduate scholars of contemporary art and the libraries that serve them must keep track of these exhibitions and access information about them.

• This is not an easy task because of their very contemporaneity, the difficulties of acquiring many of them, and the challenges of accessing them in the online catalog.
Locating Biennial Exhibition Catalogs

- Other than information for major and long-standing biennials, it is a challenge to locate exhibition catalogs on newer exhibitions
- Talk to contemporary art curators in your city
- Sign-up for List-Servs like the excellent E-Flux
Web Sites That Keep Us Updated

- **Universes in Universe** – Includes a tab for Biennials and provides a calendar (continuously updated), photos and biennial web sites
- **Asian Art Archive** – Projects Online – biennial section, map, timeline, and calendar
- Also check online catalogs of institutions that collect contemporary art:
  - MOMA – DADABASE
  - Museum of Contemporary Art, LA Library
Other Ways to Learn of Biennials

- Read, read, read and read some more – contemporary art journals
- Talk to vendors like Worldwide Art Books
- Talk to contemporary art curators at museums in your area
- Use the CAAH List-Serv
- Use ARLIS-L
Which Vendors to Use

• A large, general vendor like Yankee Book Peddler, which Pitt uses, stocks a few traditional titles.
• Distributed Art Books (DAP)
• An art vendor like Worldwide Art Books reliably carries the traditional biennial catalogs + some of the newer “global” titles.
• They offer a splendid website that includes under “Advanced Search”
• A “Specialized Series” Search that includes biennials; the staff offers excellent help
• You can also see on their web site if they have back issues in stock
Specialized Vendors

- Arts Bibliographic, UK
- Otto Harrasowitz – Western Europe, esp. Germany
- Aux amateurs de livres - France
- Casalini Libri - Italy
- Howard Karno – Latin American publications
- Libros Latinos – Latin American publications
- Africa Book Centre – Based in London
- Clarke’s Bookshop – South Africa
- Soumbala – Books on African Art published in the French language
- Powerhouse Bookshop & Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art Shop - Australia
- Timezone 8 & Chinese Contemporary - China
- Vendors of Russian & East European Materials
- Mapin Publishing – S.E. Asia
Out of Print Vendors

- Abebooks
- Alibris
- Ars Libri
How Do Vendors Decide What to Stock?

- They stock traditional biennials
- For newer biennials: Is the catalog published with a commercial publisher and, therefore, more easily available and willing to work with the vendor?
- Are major scholarly curators involved?
- How many extra copies to acquire? We art librarians need to let them know of our interest!
Vendors Face More Challenges Than Art Librarians Do!

- They want to serve us – they are businesses!
- Will a catalog be published? If so, when?
- The catalogs are published by the host country, perhaps there are language barriers on one or both ends of the inquiry
- Will anyone from the biennial staff or news agency answer the vendor’s emails of phone calls?
- Do the biennial organizers / curators understand the value of selling to libraries or anyone outside the biennial site?
- Is there a reliable publishing system in that country?
- Can they pack, box, and adequately mail in that country?
- In what condition will the books arrive?
Other Challenges

- Does the vendor in that country have an export license? How large can the shipment be in order to go through customs?
- Is the catalog well printed and edited?
- Is there a large enough print run?
- If the biennial staff does not have or work with an established publisher or distributor, the catalog goes out of print quickly
- Will the new biennial continue?
- Johannesburg had only two iterations before the city ran out of money to support it.
More Challenges

- Propsect Biennial in New Orleans:
  - Promising and promising the next exhibition catalog (2012 and exhibition now closed), but the catalog has not been issued

- Kiev in Ukraine – State financed Mystetskyi Arsenal - 1st contemporary art biennale, 2012; but recently an exhibition of contemporary art in Ukraine was closed down! Will the biennial take place?

- In Japan, the publishers and vendors are connected to the government which presents obstacles to obtaining catalogs
Acquiring the Biennial Catalogs

- It is becoming more common for an exhibition to issue more than one volume or more than one publication
- All “national” pavilions of Venice Biennale
- Documenta 11, 2003 was held simultaneously as 5 “platforms” in several cities on five continents; each with a unique title – a statement on globalization
- Is the Acquisitions Department allowed to work with an unknown vendor?
- Were all volumes ordered? Has the Acquisitions Department acquired all volumes?
Case: Documenta 11, 2003

- Platform 1 – *Democracy Unrealized*
- Platform 2 – *Experiments with Truth*
- Platform 3 – *Créolité and Creolization*
- Platform 4 – *Under Siege: Four African Cities*
  – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos
- The curator himself did not know if or when all the platforms would be published!
- Platform 5 – Another problematic!
Documenta 11, 2003 – Platform 5

- It was in more than one volume!!
- Vol. 1 – *Exhibition Short Guide* (paper, quarto, 260 pages)
- Vol. 2 – *Catalogue Appendix* – (thin paper, oversize, 51 pages) – Artists’ biographies – why not included in the next volume? Did the planners forget that?
- Vol. 3 – *Catalogue* (hardback, oversize. 620 pages)
- *Exhibition Venues* (hardback, un-numbered volume, photographs only)
Documenta 13, 2012

- First announced a series entitled “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts”
- We dutifully ordered all of them; they are still being published (out of sequence)
- Later advertised a 3–volume catalog, volume 1 of which, maddeningly, includes all 100 brochures + other essays, so that it had to be ordered!
- A marketing ploy? Or rethinking things in the midst of working on the show?
How Are the Biennials Made Accessible in the Online Catalog?

• During the 21st century, many biennials have begun to have theme titles
• 49th, 2001 Venice Biennale – *Plateau of Humankind*
• 50th, 2003 – *Dreams and Conflicts*
• 52nd, 2007 – *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind*
• 53rd, 2011 – *Illuminations*
• These may well be cataloged according to theme, rather than with the set of biennials
How to Locate Catalogs by Author

- Frequently entered under the official name of the exhibition as author and using the language of the hosting country:
  - Bienal: Uluslararasi Istanabul Bienali
  - Biennale di Venezia
  - Biennial Exhibition (Whitney Museum of American Art)
How to Locate Catalogs by Title

- *Dreams and Conflicts* (title of the 50th Biennale di Venezia)
- or
- *La Biennale di Venezia: 49 esposizione* …
LC Subject Heading

- Art Modern 20th Century – Exhibitions
- Art Modern 21st Century – Exhibitions
- Both headings require browsing way too many entries in the online catalog!
- Art Australia Sydney Exhibitions = brings up all exhibitions held in this city, not just the exhibition entitled Sydney Biennial
- Art Turkey Istanbul Exhibitions Periodicals = Because catalogs for international art exhibitions are issued “periodically”
Keyword Searches Are Tricky!

- Venice AND Biennial = only 8 results, some of which are catalogs for individual pavilions
- Venezia AND Biennale = 155 results
- “Documenta” as a single word search produces more than 400 results
- “Documenta AND Kassel” limits the search to 91 results
- Do the user’s know how to do keyword searches? Know the original languages?
How Can Art Librarians Help Vendors and Catalogers?

• Call Worldwide Art Books and other vendors and ask if they will be stocking a certain biennial!
• Talk to contemporary art faculty or curators in your area.
• They travel to these exhibitions!
• Encourage them to speak to organizers about their need for scholarly documentation
How Can We Help?, Contin.

- Talk to ARLIS/NA catalogers about best practices in cataloging biennials and share with your institution’s Cataloging Department
- Can ARLIS, ARLIS/NA and CAA write a joint letter to biennial organizing committees? Explain that scholars need their publications and they can increase funds received by making the catalogs easily available!
Please contact me!

I welcome all critically constructive comments!

(A bibliography follows for those who wish to see it in the conference proceedings.)

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Bibliography about Biennial Exhibitions


Bibliography, contin.


Bibliography, contin.

- “Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition.” *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003): 152-163.

- A debate with curators and artists: James Meyer, Francesco Bonami, Martha Rosler, Okwui Enwezor, Yinka Shonibare, Catherine David, and Hans Ulrich Obrist


Bibliography, contin.


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Please Contact Me!

- I am very interested in hearing your comments!

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