The Venice Biennale and the Art Market (London, 4–5 Feb 2016)

London, Feb 4–05, 2016
Deadline: Jun 21, 2015

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The Venice Biennale and the Art Market, the Venice Biennale as an Art Market: Anatomy of a Complex Relationship

Over its history, the strategic positioning of the Venice Biennale has seemingly oscillated between a pure exhibition platform and a hybrid exhibition/exchange platform. At its inception in 1895, the venture strongly pushed forward an aim of aesthetic experimentation (laboratorio della modernità) whilst emphasising its scorn of mercantile concerns (prosaicità mercantile). However the 1899 Catalogue of the Biennale blatantly belied such initial aim when it signalled the presence of a sales bureau at the heart of the exhibition palace. From then onwards, the Venice venture openly acknowledged its function as a market of international contemporary art, so much so that its General Secretary claimed in 1906 that the market dimension was a core component of the Biennale. In spite of drastic artistic, structural and aesthetic evolution, the Biennale seemingly remained a hybrid exhibition/exchange platform until 1968.
Due to student protests against bourgeois art, values and consumption, the post-1968 Biennale closed down its sales bureau and initiated a thorough rethinking of its raison d'être and positioning. Thereafter it gradually assumed a role as mediator between market and institutional structures as it focussed on a leading role in disseminating the latest artistic trends. This latest phase of its historical development seems to have looped the Biennale back to its initial aim of bringing forward aesthetic experimentation with no links with the art market. Or has it?
Taking the Venice Biennale as a paradigm, this interdisciplinary conference invites papers to probe the obvious or subtle links between contemporary art (both historically and today), its circuits of distribution and the art market. Contributions may cover (but are not restricted to) the following areas:
• Symbolic and/ vs. economic capital in the circuit of art distribution
• Comparison with ventures similar to the Venice Biennale
• Historical and contemporary case studies of contemporary art consumption at the Biennale
• Strategic positioning in the art world and its evolution
• Networks of power and their influence on strategic positioning

Our keynote speaker is Olav Velthuis, currently Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, who has written on the 'contradictory logics of art and business' in the contemporary art market in Talking Prices (2005). He has also edited Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios (Sternberg Press, 2012)

Abstracts should be approximately 300 words in length for papers of 20 minutes. Potential speakers should also include a brief biography of 150 words in Microsoft WORD. Please send it to Marie Cambefort-Tavinor: m.cambefort@iesa.edu

Reference:

CFP: The Venice Biennale and the Art Market (London, 4-5 Feb 2016). In: ArtHist.net, May 7, 2015 (accessed Nov 20, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/10207>.