

The Fraught Significations of Contemporary Biennials (Zurich, 19–20 May 22)

University of Zurich, Rämistrasse 59, Building RAA, Hall G01, May 19–20, 2022

Julie Ren, Charlotte Matter, Ifigeneia Dimitrakou, Rosa Sancarolo, Virginia Marano

In Light of Crisis: The Fraught Significations of Contemporary Biennials

The symposium “In Light of Crisis: The Fraught Significations of Contemporary Biennials” proposes an intensive exchange about how to understand art and architecture biennials through the lens of crisis. Rather than operating in the shadow of assumptions about what crisis might represent, we seek to scrutinize crisis more productively, in terms of the biennial in crisis, its crisis of meaning and the crises of representation (Cf. Verhagen, 2012; Oguibe, 2004; Dimitrakaki, 2012) as well as the context of crises, the distances that crisis creates in terms of the translation of reality in creative production (Cramerotti and Mele, 2021) or the normalization of crisis as an unending precariousness haunting everyday life (Berlant, 2011; Battacharyya, 2015; Hall, 2019). As a field-configuring event, proliferating in cities around the world from Kampala to Kobe, the biennial offers a particular lens through which to analyze these different senses of crisis. Biennials often represent a cultural frontier, featuring work not yet acquired by any museum, often specially commissioned and curated for each setting with intensive scrutiny. At times, they champion socio-political issues like indigenous rights, climate change, and economic and political crises, and they are increasingly redressing problems of cultural representation (Filipovic, Ovstebo and Van Hal, 2010; Ren, 2021). Nonetheless, the attempt to inspire public debate is coupled with the struggle to reconcile critical aims of these events with the political economy of elite circuits of curators, artists/architects, and writers that in turn breed the creative and financial capital necessary to sustain their cultural value. These events inspire anticipation, speculation and disdain, and new actors must constantly pursue questions of their own relevance (Wah, 2021). The inflation of capital involved in these markets is also coupled with exploitative practices employing precarious labor, and often form convenient alliances with tourism and real estate industries.

Against this background, the symposium invites experts and researchers to reflect on the following questions: What does the biennial do (Lind and Rujoio, 2019), to whom and at what cost? What does this contribute to our understanding of the biennial format in crisis or the context of crises, and how are these entwined?

Organizers: Julie Ren, Charlotte Matter, Ifigeneia Dimitrakou, Rosa Sancarolo, Virginia Marano

Keynote speaker: Varsha Nair, Womanifesto

Programme

Thursday, 19 May 2022

9:30-9:45 Welcome from the Organizing Team

Ifigeneia Dimitrakou, Virginia Marano, Charlotte Matter, Julie Ren, Rosa Sancarlo

9:45-12:15 Session 1| In Quest of a Thrill: Spectacles and the Speculative

Taking the biennial as a field-configuring kind of spectacle, and seeing it through the lens of crises of meaning and context, what is the role of fluidity (going with the flow) and powerful factor (setting new courses)?

Speakers: Jeannine Tang, Adrian Lahoud and Adam Jasper

12:15-13:15 Lunch

13:15-15:45 Session 2| Discomforted, the Biennial and its (Dis)affective Turns

What is exposed or revealed about biennials in a context of crisis if concepts like emotion and affect are seen as instruments of investigation vs. objects of investigation?

Speakers: Divya Tolia-Kelly, Adam Kaasa and Ilaria Conti

15:45-16:15 Coffee

16:15-17:30 Varsha Nair "Of Key: Notes on Womanifesto's Fluidity"

18:00 Apéro

Friday, 20 May 2022

10:00-12:30 Session 3| The Perpetuity of Crisis, Precarity and Exploitation: Mutations and Manifestations

What significations can be discerned in biennials' stubbornness, their (potential) qualities of resisting, enduring and persevering, particularly when crises call into question their relevance?

Speakers: Julie Ren, Maria Bremer and Panos Kompatsiaris

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:00 Moderators' report: Key themes, Issues, Questions

14:00-16:30 Workshop

16:30-17:30 Final Plenary: Quo Vadis? Biennials in Uncertain Times

The event is open to the public.

For more information:
https://www.geo.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:57ca13d3-6626-4b86-b18a-ffb9245ca5fc/symposium%20program_FINAL_A4.pdf

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Reference:

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