

CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

Instructor: Alexander Alberro

Summer Intensive 2019

AHIS OC3431

Location: tbd

Seminar meetings: Wednesday 9:00-11:00am; Friday 9:00am-12:00pm, & 1:30-3:30pm.

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This seminar introduces the relationship between contemporary artistic practices and the regularly recurring survey shows of international art that have come, since the late 1980s, to define contemporary art. These landmark survey shows are commonly known as “biennials, but encompass not just exhibitions that recur every two years but also triennials, irregular mega-exhibitions known as manifestas, and the quinquennial survey exhibition, documenta. They are one of the most ubiquitous and celebrated exhibition formats across the globe, appearing in cities as different as São Paulo, Istanbul, Havana, Dakar, Seoul, and Kochi. A large art public encounters contemporary art solely within the frames of these exhibitions, while the constellation of artists and art from diverse cultures and places that these events feature has generated vital intercultural dialogues.

The seminar will explore not only the benefits to art history and art making brought by the biennials, such as the ways they draw local artists into ostensibly global networks of art world attention and financial support, but also the extent to which these mega-exhibitions have contributed to the spread of transnational capital and imperialist politics associated with the current systemic deepening of capitalist relations commonly referred to as neoliberalism. The extent to which biennials replicate and reinforce the neocolonial flows of international commerce, politics and power will be one of our central concerns.

Rather than a history of biennials, the seminar will seek to come to an understanding of the impact of global mega-exhibitions on infrastructure of contemporary art, a network based on local customs and productions but defined by global exhibitions, markets, art criticism and online platforms. Rejecting the modernist assumption that art has a cultural and geographic center located in Western Europe and North America, we will instead explore the more decentralized vision of art’s communicative potential that has accompanied contemporary art.

Requirements

1. Attend all class meetings, complete all readings before the class, make several class presentations, and write a 1500-word term paper. During seminar sessions, you will be expected to come to class having read the assigned texts, and prepared to speak about them. Lively, informed discussion is our goal, and you are asked to contribute your own unique perspective to our conversations. How effectively you intervene in class discussion will be part of your grade. Satisfactory completion of all assignments and examinations is necessary to pass the course.

2. Each class meeting one or two members of the class will be asked to present a 10-minute PowerPoint Case Study presentation. Each Case Study will feature two artworks exhibited at or alongside this year's Venice Biennale that encompass some of the issues central to the class readings. You do not need to construct an argument or thesis about the artwork in question for this short presentation.

3. The class will be divided into groups, each of which will take turns leading class discussion during seminar meetings. This will include preparing brief oral presentations about the readings, offering questions to stimulate discussion, and, if necessary, bringing in images that serve as a focal point for analysis. Presentations should explicate the most important issues raised in the readings, and include information on how the approaches articulated depart from those of previously studied authors.

4. Each student will write a 1000-word paper focusing on two artworks included in the Biennial. The artworks in question do not need to be the same ones that were the focus of your Case Study presentation. The research paper should analyze the formal dimensions of the works carefully and place the artworks in their historical frameworks in terms of the genre in which they operate, the debates that they take part in, the issues that they seek to communicate, and the context from which they originate. The central arguments must be clearly stated and supported.

5. The final sessions will include presentations of research. Each student will present a fifteen-minute-long version of his or her research paper to the seminar in the most professional manner possible. Following each presentation, the student presenting will field questions from the other members of the seminar.

6. On July 20, the final draft of the paper will be handed in to me. To grade the paper, I will not only evaluate its inherent merits (e.g., how well it is written, how clearly stated, original and supported the central arguments are, etc.), but also assess how well the issues and questions raised following the seminar presentation have been addressed.

7. In general, a grade of "C" indicates adequate mastery of the material and merely competent written and oral presentation; a "B" shows additional effort, with full understanding of the data and concepts, clear and well-produced written work and regular class participation; an "A" is reserved for those students producing superior work, which includes a full comprehension of materials accompanied by thoughtful, well-written papers that go beyond the assignment and exceptional class participation.

8. Qualified students with disabilities needing appropriate academic adjustments should contact me as soon as possible to ensure your needs are met in a timely manner.

Note: As you set out to research and write your term paper, I'd like you to consider the following skills that you should strive to master. They represent what I look for in what I read, and orient the metrics that I use when I have to assign a grade. Your paper should

pose new questions relating to the artworks that you focus on, and it should answer those questions; the methodology that you employ should arise from a close reading of the artworks, and you should be able to explain what that methodology is; your ideas should be situated in relation to scholarly work about the artworks in question that has come before yours; those relations should be explained in a responsible manner (a sign of intellectual maturity is when the author does not need to discredit other scholars to make her or his own points); your study should be written in clear prose that uses specialized terminology only when necessary and in those cases explains the terminology; and broader generalizations should arise from close reading of the artworks in question, not the other way around.

Learning Outcomes

Students taking this course will be able to recognize the key components of a Biennial exhibition, as well as the relationship between this type of international exhibition and the contemporary phenomenon that is commonly referred to as globalization. Students will also learn the ways in which art shapes ethics and values in a global context, and come to an understanding of the elements of those values that continue to be operative. Students who successfully complete the course will be able to discuss cultural concerns relevant to the analysis of the relationship between art and society, as well as cultural concerns relevant to the analysis of contemporary art more generally, including changing notions of artistic subjectivity, the nature of the art object, the profound impact of technology on cultural and social practices, the ways in which artists respond to the dramatically changing notions of space, time and dimension, and evolving perspectives on the role and subjectivity of the spectator. The accounts of the readings that are a course requirement will teach students how to read closely and articulate the central theses of a text. The final paper will teach students how to analyze form, conduct research, and construct an argument using art historical forms of evidence, in particular visual information.

Course Materials

All of the readings will be distributed prior to or at the beginning of the course, and will remain on Dropbox for the duration. There will be some additional readings to be determined as we move through this year's biennale since the catalogue and early press are not yet available.

Schedule and Value of Tests and Paper

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| 1. Class presentations (including case studies and reading reports) | 40% of grade |
| 2. Class participation | 30% of grade |
| 3. Paper, due July 20 | 30% of grade |

Lecture/Seminar Schedule and Readings

(The schedule of lectures is provisional and subject to revision.)

Wednesday, June 12, 9:00am-11:00am: “The 57th Venice Biennale”

- 1) Reviews of the biennial (to be accumulated as they become available).
- 2) David Joselit, “Globalization, Networks, and the Aggregate as Form,” in H. Foster, et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Third Edition, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2016), 51-60.
- 3) Marcus Verhagen, “On ‘Global Art,’” *Flows and Counterflows. Globalisation in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 175-190, 194.

Friday, June 14, 9:00am-12:00pm: “The Venice Biennale”

- 1) Joel Robinson, “Folkloric Modernism: Venice’s Giardini Della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture”
- 2) Rafael Niemojewski, “Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial,” *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, et al. (Hatje Cantz, 2010), 88-103
- 3) Caroline Jones, “Old World/Biennial Culture,” *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 81-112, 263-267.
- 4) Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, “Introduction: Why Biennials?” *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 5-16.)
- 5) Sarah Thornton, “The Biennial,” from *Seven Days in the Art World* ((New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2008), 219-259.

Reading presentations:

Friday, June 14, 1:30-3:30pm: site visit to the Giardini

Wednesday, June 19, 9:00am-11:00am: “Biennial Culture”

- 1) Elena Filipovic, et al., “Biennialogy,” *The Biennial Reader*, 12-25
- 2) Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” *The Biennial Reader*, 426-445
- 3) Geraldo Mosquera, “The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism,” *The Biennial Reader*, 416-425
- 4) Pascal Gielen, “The Biennial: A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour,” *Open*, No.16 (2009), 8-17.
- 5) Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, “2002: Cosmopolitanism,” *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 183-206.

Case study: #1

Reading presentation:

Friday, June 20, 9:00am-12:00pm: “Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity”

- 1) Kitty Zijlmans, "The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art System," *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. K. Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 135-150.
- 2) Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art," *The Global Art World*, ed. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 38-73
- 3) Joan Kee, "Moves in the Field," *Field Notes*, 1 (Summer 2012), 30-33 www.aaa.org.hk
- 4) Gail Day and Steve Edwards, "Global Dissensus: Art and Contemporary Capitalism," *Art & Visual Culture 1850-2010: Modernity to Globalisation* (London: The Open University, 2012), 285-315.
- 5) Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, "2003: Delegating Authority," *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 209-239.

Case study: #2, and #3

Reading presentation:

Friday, June 20, 1:30-3:30pm: site visit to the Arsenale

Wednesday, June 26, 9:00-11:00am: Circulation

- 1) Boris Groys, "From Medium to Message: The Art Exhibition as Model of a New World Order," *Open*, Boris No.16 (2009), 56-65.
- 2) David Joselit, from *After Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013).
- 3) Michael Hardt, "Production and Distribution of the Common: A Few Questions for the Artist," *Open*, No.16 (2009), 20-28.
- 4) Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism," *Open*, No.16 (2009), 32-40.
- 5) Gill Perry, "Border Crossings: Installations, Locations and Travelling Artists," *Art & Visual Culture 1850-2010: Modernity to Globalisation* (London: The Open University, 2012), 249-283.
- 6) Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, "2014: Global Art Circuits," *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 241-271.

Case study: #4

Reading presentation:

Friday, June 28, 9:00am-12:00pm: The PostColony

- 1) Anthony Gardner, "Whither the Postcolonial?" in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011),
- 2) David Clark, "Contemporary Asian Art and the West," in *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
- 3) Jean Fischer, "The Syncretic Turn: Cross-cultural Practices in the Age of Multiculturalism," *New Histories*, ed. Milena Kalinovska et al. (Boston, MA: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996).

- 4) Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, "19989: Asian Biennialization," "1997: Biennials, Migration, and Itinerancy" (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 111-179.
- 5) Walter D. Mignolo, "What Does it Mean to Decolonialize?," "The Conceptual Triad: Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality," and "The Invention of the Human and the Three Pillars of the Colonial Matrix of Power: Racism, Sexism, and Nature," from Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2018), 105-176.

Case study: #5, and #6

Reading presentation:

Friday, June 28, 1:30-3:30pm: site visits to Biennale off sites/national pavilions

Wednesday, July 3, 9:00am-12:00am: "Images and the Experiential Turn"

- 1) Marcus Verhagen, "On Artists and Other Tourists," and "Border Control and Category Error," *Flows and Counterflows. Globalisation in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 56-93, 192-193.
- 2) Dorothea Von Hantelman, "The Experiential Turn—On Performativity" (2014)
<http://www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/>
- 3) Lane Relyea, "Your Art Word: Or, The Limits of Connectivity," *Afterall*, 14 (Autum/Winter 2006), 3-8.
- 4) Caroline Jones, "The Aesthetics of Experience," *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 195-195-223, 285-288.

Case study: #7

Reading presentation:

Friday, July 5, 9:00am-12:00pm: "The Role of Culture"

- 1) Michael Peter Smith, "The Global City: Whose Social Construct is it Anyway?" *Urban Affairs Review*, 33:4 (1998)
- 2) Pamela Lee, "Boundary Issues: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism" (November 2003)
- 3) Isabelle Graw, from *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Sternberg Press, 2009), 9-79
- 4) Thierry de Duve, "The Glocal and the Singuniversal: Reflections on Art and Culture in the Global World," *Open*, No.16 (2009), 44-53.

Case Study: #8, and #9

Reading presentation:

Friday, July 5, 1:30-3:30pm: Site visit tbd

Wednesday, July 10, 9:00-11:00am: “Diasporic, Counter and Public Spheres”

- 1) “Global Tendencies. Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition,” roundtable organized by Tim Griffin and including James Meyer, Catherine David, Martha Rosler, Okwui Enwezor, Francesco Bonami, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Yinka Shonibare, *Artforum* (November 2003)
- 2) Monica Juneja, “Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation,’” *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture* (2011)
- 3) Chin-Tao Wu, “Worlds Apart: Problems of Interpreting Globalised Art,” *Third Text*, 21:6 (November 2007), 719-731.
- 4) Caroline Jones, “Critical Globalism in Practice,” *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 225-250, 288-291.

Case study: #10

Reading presentation:

Friday, July 12, 9:00am-12:00pm: “The Local, the Global, and the Non-place”

- 1) Mark Augé, “From Places to Non-Places,” *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 75-115
- 2) Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality,” *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 178-198, 204.
- 3) Walter D. Mignolo, “Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures,” *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson et al. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998), 32-53
- 4) Charlotte Bydler, “The Global Art World, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art,” *The Biennial Reader*, 378-405.
- 5) John Byrne, “Contemporary Art and Globalization: Biennials and the Emergence of the De-Centered Artist,” *International Journal of the Humanities*, 3 (2003), 169-172.

Case study: #11 & #12

Reading presentation:

Friday, July 12, 1:30-3:30pm: Site visit tbd

Wednesday, July 17, 9:00-11:00am: Final presentations

Friday, July 19, 9:00am-12:00pm: Final presentations

Friday, July 19, 1:30-3:30pm: Final presentations