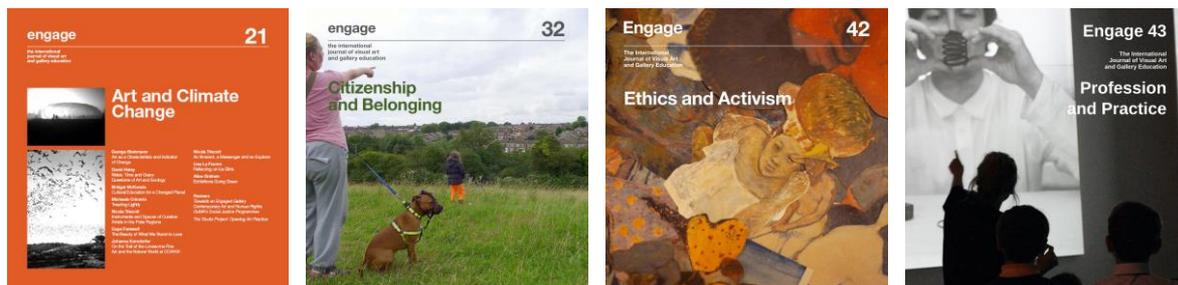


Call for proposals — Engage 44: Biennials and Beyond

Edited by Sarah Perks

The outline below, stimulated by a discussion with the Engage Journal Editorial Advisory Board (EAB), is followed by a series of questions. Please address these or use them as prompts in proposals for articles.



Proposals are invited for issue 44 of the Engage Journal, *Engage Journal 44: Biennials and Beyond*. This issue will focus on biennials relationships to gallery education and engagement programmes. Deadline for proposals: Friday 13 December 2019, 10:00 am

Biennials have been part of the ecology of the art world for many years, with the biennial (or *biennale* as per the original Italian) becoming a shorthand for a recurring event that occurs in a specific place. The majority follow the lead established by most famous, the Venice Biennale, which since 1895 has set a precedent, not just of frequency, but of national participation and awards. And more importantly perhaps, it established a concept for regeneration, designed to reboot Venice as a tourist destination and to utilise an area of the city that needed repurposing.

Post-WWII, Germany launched possibly the most anticipated event in the international art calendar, Documenta (1955–), returning now every five years to Kassel, in the centre of what was then West Germany. In Engage 20: Strategic interpretation, Carmen Moersch describes how the role of education began to change during Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's 2012 edition¹. The most recent Documenta (2017) developed extensive and intensive education programmes across Kassel and Athens (where it was partly held), led by their Head of Education Sepake Angiama (now about to take on the role of Director of INIVA after being at the Chicago Architecture Biennial). Some of this experience is captured in her publication *Aneducation: Documenta 14*, a sophisticated attempt to include a cross section of the contributors, described as:

¹ Carmen Moersch, C. (2007) 'Gallery Education as Critical Practice and Research at documenta 12' in Raney, K. (ed), *Engage 20: Strategic interpretation*. London: Engage, the National Association for Gallery Education, pp. 34-40

“This is not a book of good intentions. It attempts to introduce a chorus of voices that speak from different positions on an education, the education program for Learning from documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel.”²

Several biennials from the 1980s onwards began to think about whose voices were included, and to contest the promotion of (Western) nationhood, modelling new forms of curatorial strategies and privileging artists from less well established art centres. The Havana Biennial (1984) is often remarked on as this changing point and Okwui Enwezor’s 2002 Documenta heralded as the first major post-colonial biennial and he was the first artistic director not from Europe. Enwezor will also be the first to posthumously curate a major Biennial, with his initial notes to be used for Sharjah Biennial 2021, ‘Thinking Historically in the Present’. The Biennial Foundation currently lists 260 in its global directory, although there are many more in smaller towns and regions across the world.³ Europe’s nomadic biennial, Manifesta, even asked the question of its first Advisory Board: “biennials don’t work, so why start another?”

The UK has grown several well established biennials including the Brighton Photo Biennial (2003–), Artes Mundi in Cardiff (2002–), Glasgow International (2005–), and the Liverpool Biennial (1999–). Until recently, the Liverpool Biennial by Sally Tallant — previously Head of Programmes at Serpentine and now Director of Queens Museum, New York — whose methodology underpinned the Biennial with research and education,. These and other internationally-focused biennales have brought a much needed diversity and debate to the UK context. With Brexit looming and anxiety around funding, are we looking at less opportunities for international collaboration and dialogue — and therefore education — for the UK? In the autumn of 2020, the quinquennial exhibition called the British Art Show returns to tour UK cities, Manchester, Wolverhampton, Aberdeen and Plymouth, how will it deal now with the geographical definition implied of its title? New biennials include Coventry (2017–) established and ran by artists to lead up to Coventry City of Culture in 2021. Biennial culture seems to largely favour a city, or a seaside town (Whitstable Biennale (2002–), Folkstone Triennial (2008–)), so where does this leave rural areas? What are the successful models or equivalents that create impact and engagement with visual art across rural areas?

More recently there has appeared a trend for a regular biennial type event by issue or artform, including the British Ceramics (2009–) and Textile (2019–) Biennials, Asia Triennial Manchester (2008–), Yorkshire Sculpture International (2019–) and a forthcoming performance triennial in Scotland for 2020. The once every two years structure is also pervading more contemporary and cross-art form festival arrangements (for example Manchester International Festival), with the notion of spectacular event culture underpinning the once-every-four-years capital of culture bids across the UK. UK capital of culture was set up after the success of Liverpool becoming the European City of Culture, but what is the real legacy of these and other major initiatives such as the Cultural Olympiad of 2012?

² S. Angiama, C. Butcher, A. Efthymiou, A. Kats and A. Zeqo (eds.). (2018) *an education – documenta 14*. Berlin: Archive Books

³ <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/home/biennial-map/>

Education and engagement programmes vary widely across biennials but are an important feature in most locations, with larger biennials including teams designed in the style of gallery-based activity including formal and informal fields, artist development, public debate and digital engagement. Some collaborate effectively with existing engagement offers or offer incentives for 'local' artists, in some part presumably to ensure their buy in, and some offer curatorial roles specifically for education. Despite these moves, the infrequency of the 'main event' must present some significant challenges to creating sustainable and meaningful education programmes around biennials outside of institutions. The Critical Practices group at the Winchester School of Art, as initiated by Professor Robert E. D'Souza, have been working closely with the Kochi-Muziris Biennial (2012–) since its inception to study the 'biennale effect' and evaluate considerations of geography, local impact, politics, economics and more.

Biennials have a reputation for contradiction and controversy. They frequently attempt to address the burning issues of the day, hoping to break new waves or at least hit the zeitgeist, for example around issues of representation and issues of de-colonising the art world. This year's Whitney Biennial saw artwork addressing (by UK based collective Forensic Architecture), and protests concerning, the 'tear gas' company owner and museum's vice chair Warren Kanders that led to his resignation. The biennial is a respected place for making the careers of artists and yet only this year did the Venice Biennial reach a gender parity for men and women. They often represent an opportunity to experience a tremendous amount of new artwork for locals and visitors alike, and for professionals to share practice internationally. Of course, all of this requires travel. The 1990s saw a proliferation in cheap airlines which also aligned with the increase and spread of biennials across the globe, and this was also a time when UK arts communities became increasingly international in their focus and projects.

Climate change has become a concern for both the production and content of these events. This year Nicolas Bourriaud took on the environmental issues for *The Seventh Continent* (Istanbul Biennial 2019), a reference to the amount of waste floating in the ocean, whilst simultaneously claiming that 'art world travel is just a drop in the ocean' (The Art Newspaper, 12 Sept 2019),⁴ instead accusing mass tourism and large corporations of causing the problem. Jérôme Bel, an internationally renowned choreographer who is also a regular of visual art biennials, quit flying completely in February of this year on the realisation he was contributing to ecological damage (The New York Times, 23 Sep 2019).⁵ He has since been working via Skype to make performances happen in North America. If Jérôme's example is replicated elsewhere, how will environmentally conscious policy begin to impact upon artistic and educational programmes of visual arts organisations and galleries? What are the environmentally friendly strategies and viable alternatives to travelling for biennials and events that also keep open vital cross-cultural dialogue?

Whilst biennials of the art world try hard to defy categorisation through their sheer diversity and breadth of scale, they are also united by often common reasons for existence and in their exploration of the new and for commissioning contemporary

⁴ <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/taking-on-the-climate-crisis-istanbul-biennial>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/arts/dance/jerome-bel-isadora-no-flying.html>

art. There is an urgent need to debate and evaluate further the role of education in these biennials and indeed consider impact, value and legacy across a range of artistic, environmental and socio-political factors.

Questions

We are interested in contributions from colleagues in the UK and worldwide that concern the topic of biennials and other art events and specifically where this connects to gallery and visual art education. Proposals should address questions such as:

- How do biennials effectively construct meaningful and sustainable education programmes and promote public engagement with visual art? What can we learn from examples from biennials and events internationally?
- What have been the key developments for education and engagement programmes for biennials and repeated art events?
- What has the sector learnt from evaluation methods and strategies, and what is the wider legacy of this work?
- How have biennials worked alongside or integrated into existing gallery education programmes? What do sustainable models look like?
- How has 'spectacular art culture' and its related programmes affected communities and a sense of place? How has 'biennial regeneration' worked in practice across schools, colleges, universities and other centres? Examples of where biennials have enacted successful methods of participation.
- How will biennial culture continue a dialogue that addresses climate change concerns? What impact will developing environmentally conscious policies have on artistic and education programmes, and cross-cultural ambition?
- How do biennales support and represent the development of emerging artists, curators and colleagues working in education and participation? What can biennials offer for work experience and career progression?
- How can biennial type events impact in a hyper-local or rural situation?

If you are interested in contributing to this issue, please send an informal proposal of no more than 300 words, your job/freelance title and contact details to communications@engage.org by Friday 13 December 2019, 10:00 am

Contributions may take the format of articles, interviews, collaborative pieces, conversations, photo essays or discussions, and engage welcomes those which take advantage of the Journal's online format, through the use of sound or video clips, film and html links to digital content. As a guide, final articles lie between 1,500 and 3,000 words.

Issue timeline

- Proposals deadline: Friday 13 December 2019, 10:00 am
- Finished article deadline: Friday 14 February 2020, 10:00 am
- Engage 43: Biennials and beyond (working title) will be published in March 2020

About the Engage Journal

First published in 1996, the Engage Journal is the international journal of visual art and gallery education. Now a twice-yearly online publication, the contents of each edition follow themes linked to the visual arts and education, chosen through an open-submission process. The Journal acts as a snapshot of current thinking on a subject, a repository of references, a source of practical ideas, and a forum for exchange between different parts of the art and museum and gallery community.

The Journal is edited by Sarah Perks, curator, consultant and writer. The Journal is governed by a voluntary Editorial Advisory Board. The Engage Journal is accessible to Engage members and subscribers to the publication. To learn more please visit <https://engage.org/journals/>.

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