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## Post-West: Guangzhou Triennial, Taipei Biennial, and Singapore Biennale

There was a long, uncomfortable pause in the translation, and an obvious discomfort in the room. I leant towards the interpreter and asked what had been said. Again, a pause. “Please,” I insisted, “tell me *exactly* what he said.” She answered, “I am so fed up with having the West stuffed down my throat to the point where I want to puke.”

By now the symposium discussion I was attending was certainly more animated than before, and had long moved on to other speakers. I, however, was so surprised by the directness of the remark, by its sense of frustration, that I was no longer following the discussion. The colleague who had made the remark seemed spent by his anger and sat quietly opposite me. We have known one another for several years. I recalled our first meeting at documenta, in 2002, his youthfulness at that time, and his enthusiasm about being in Europe. What had happened in only six years that he was now so angry at the West? I wanted to ask him about his remark but, as is the way with symposia, the numerous speakers each needed their turn and suddenly the moderator announced that it was over. Everyone withdrew for the opening of the exhibition and I was left alone with my thoughts.

It was an exceedingly hot day, August 2, and only six days before the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were about to start. The opening of the exhibition for which the symposium had been organized<sup>1</sup> began shortly after, as did the star-studded inaugural exhibition of New York’s Pace Gallery in its vast, new space down the street in Beijing’s 798 Art District. My young colleague’s comments, however, would not leave me. He was certainly not alone in his sentiments. One was acutely aware of a deep disillusionment with the West at this time in China. The attack on the paralympian and Olympic torch bearer, Jin Jing, on April 7 in Paris had led to widespread calls in China to boycott French goods and the department store Carrefour. And, as the BBC reported, a musical retort against the perceived bias of the Western media with regard to China had quickly spread across Chinese blogs and chat rooms: “Don’t be too CNN.”<sup>2</sup>

Was this sentiment against the West a new form of nationalism or a deeply felt, legitimate desire for a new kind of recognition outside of the language of mutual propaganda? In conversations with Chinese colleagues and friends, any notion of a rising nationalism was quickly dismissed. One renowned Sinologist based in the West remarked that there was only a difference in the intensity of remarks at this time, not in their nature, and observed that I had probably not been aware of them previously because of my lack of Chinese language skills. A conversation with the Director of the Singapore Art Museum, Kwok Kian Chow, however, brought a new perspective. “One talks now,” he explained, “of a post-West period. It is not about nationalism; it is not even necessarily about the West. It is about the utopia of language in the context of globalization where there is optimism of a truly global forum. But in any linguistic situation it has to be contextualized in the realities of geopolitics. Take the use of English in international forums and the limitations that such linguistic



Opening of the Third Guangzhou Triennial, September 6, 2008. Courtesy of the Guangzhou Triennial.

use places on discussions. As a contrast, it is interesting to note that when the first modernists from China travelled to Europe, the ideas that influenced their thinking were not even in English—they were in French, or Russian, or German. The current situation is about identifying and using, specifically Chinese concepts—or non-Western concepts—to shape ideas and artistic practice. I do not think by invoking ‘Chinese’ concepts that nationalism is intended, rather it refers simply to ‘cultural characteristics.’”

Conversations in the recent past suddenly made extraordinary sense. I was, and have been for a long time, in a post-West world. I just didn’t know it!

#### **GT2008: The Third Guangzhou Triennial and Its Farewell to Post-colonialism**

A long flight to Guangzhou a few weeks later gave me ample time to read the theoretical texts on the Third Guangzhou Triennial (GT2008) written by its curators Gao Shiming, Sarat Maharaj, and Chang Tsong-zung. On the night of September 5, only hours before the Triennial was to open, what began as an interview for the purposes of writing the present article became a fascinating, intense, two-hour long debate among the three curators as to what exactly the Triennial was about and whether in fact it was saying farewell to post-colonialism (Gao Shiming) or wishing that it would fare well (Sarat Maharaj). In his “Prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium Asia,” Sarat Maharaj raised the key question, or as he phrased it, the Triennial’s “core poser”: “Does it herald an alternative conceptual continent or simply the desire to step in the West’s shoes, to be its rivalrous look-alike—in Milton’s phrase, its ‘nether empire’?”<sup>3</sup> Will our post-West world—*does* our post-West world—offer conceptual alternatives to those the West propagated?

Gao Shiming suggested in his catalogue text for GT2008, “Observations and Presentiments ‘after Post-colonialism,’” that in China the new emphasis is, and will be, on “indigenous, Chinese nature and modernity.” But in an extraordinary twist, this would not necessarily mean a return to the past, or even an interest in the origins of modernity in China in the early twentieth century. As an artist had pointed out to me only weeks earlier, he considers the early modernist discourse in China during the 1920s and 30s to be perhaps interesting but irrelevant to his own practice.<sup>4</sup> Gao Shiming phrased it succinctly: “After post-colonialism, history is in the future. As long as we eradicate metaphysical pathos, we will no longer care about who we used to be, only who we will be. . . . We cannot and need not return.”<sup>5</sup> The other key point raised by Gao Shiming was that

artists' discontent with curatorial practice had reached an "intolerable capacity." Each artist, Gao argued, "hoards a curator inside himself."<sup>6</sup> Or, as an artist from China recently expressed more bluntly, "we don't need curators anymore." Sarat Maharaj explained, "In the Chinese setting, it takes the form of concern over whether the artist's work and thinking is shown on its own terms. How to escape the 'curatorial turn' that scripts them in advance—framing them as 'Dissident Artist,' 'Post-Pop Pop Artist,' 'Merchant Conceptualist' and the like?"<sup>7</sup>

The central dilemma for the three curators of the GT2008, and indeed for all the curators of the numerous biennials and triennials that took place in Asia in September 2008, was how to deal with the "queries and quandaries"<sup>8</sup> that pockmark the idea of exhibitions or even curatorship at this time, and how to avoid the Isms that were imported from the West. Sarat Maharaj described a new, a-ideological stance that would bid farewell to Western Isms, citing Gao Xinjian, the French-Chinese Nobel Prize winner, and his influential *The Case for Literature* (2008):

Without Isms is neither nihilism nor eclecticism nor egotism or solipsism. . . .  
The idea behind Without Isms is that we need to bid goodbye to the twentieth century, and put a big question mark over those 'Isms' that dominated it.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly the discussion between Gao, Maharaj, and Chang prior to the opening of GT2008 was distinguished by an intense exchange about Isms. As the curators engaged in their at times very emotional debate, I asked myself what the consequences would be for the present article if I were to forgo the use of all Isms? What if I were to strip my text of the jargon of Western curatorial practice? What if I were not to use the word practice? Or criticism? Or modern? Where would a triennial or a biennial be without Isms, and, perhaps, without curators?

Following my meeting with Gao, Maharaj, and Chang, I wandered the rooms of the Triennial in search of the answers to exactly that question. My first impression of GT2008 was of its vertical density, layer upon layer, rather than a linear, choreographed "exhibition" that would have directed me through its spaces. Again Gao and Maharaj offered their differing interpretations. If each international exhibition promises to set up a platform for dialogue, Gao asked, "are we simply performing dialogue? Aside from the spectacle of discourse, what else does dialogue have to offer? A ruin of the Tower of Babel piled upon discourses?"<sup>10</sup> Sarat Maharaj on the other hand spoke eloquently of Pandemonium, a term denoting the capital of Hell coined by English poet John Milton (1608–1674) in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Maharaj wrote of the precipitous fall of Lucifer and his rebellious Band and their journey:

Through dementing zones of Disorder and Chaos. . . . The Band pass over sulphuric lakes, scurfy deposits, toxic fumes—not unlike the cratered, damaged environment of contemporary 'Asia in development.' . . . Pandemonium seethes with energies, a lab for alternative projects, uncreated worlds. The wild atmosphere of things on the boil visualizes a continent bristling with transformative, unknown potentials—Pandemonium Asia.<sup>11</sup>

In an act of extraordinary courage, the Director of GDMoA (Guangdong Museum of Art), Wang Huangsheng, turned over his institution and the GT2008 to a seething cauldron built on the metaphorical ruins of the Tower of Babel in which a "Pandemonium" world (not just Pandemonium Asia) could flourish. It is an exceptional accomplishment.



Yang Fudong, *Cyan Kylin*, 2007–08, installation. Courtesy of the Guangzhou Triennial.



Long March Project: Lu Jie, *No Foreigners Beyond This Point*, 2008, installation. Courtesy of the Guangzhou Triennial.

The means to interpret this “Pandemonium” world lie, according to Maharaj, not only in the codes of a rational diagnostic of the present (*Zeitdiagnose*) à la Max Weber but in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, an ancient Sanskrit play that embodies “body-mind fill up and damp down—non-cognitive charges, feel-know indexical markers, affect traces, clouds, smudges.”<sup>12</sup> For Gao Shiming, one of the nineteen projects in the Triennial’s category Thinking Room<sup>13</sup> that can “help us unpack and decode” and provide an “arsenal of thinking tools”<sup>14</sup> is *The Yellow Flight* by Wu Shanzhuan. At the Frankfurt International Airport in 1995, Wu Shanzhuan conceived of a “rhapsodic” flight departing from Beijing and arriving in Hong Kong in which one would transit at every international terminal. As the GT2008 catalogue points out, transit lounges—“situated in the aperture between nations”—are identity free and *sans baggage*.<sup>15</sup> While this project had been conceived prior to the handover of Hong Kong to China, and in an era when Chinese artists were eagerly seeking “international experience,” *The* (post-West) *Yellow Flight* at the Guangzhou Triennial took the form of a transparent smoker’s lounge situated in a deep sky-blue transit zone with pithy statements on the wall such as “The moment we found out his identity he happened not to be with that identity.” Also on the wall was a map of the world titled *THERE IS A FREEDOM CALLED IN-TRANSIT* which has been “approved by others.”

Indeed, the entire GT2008 can be described as an aperture between nations, cultures, and identities. In its large waiting room, where loitering was mandatory, one could make the acquaintance of a stunning array of artists and artworks that may, or may not, be “with” their identities. Lu Jie ensured that there would be *No Foreigners Beyond This Point* in his installation of a similarly inscribed revolving door, while Yang Fudong’s large-scale tableau, *Cyan Kylin*, of a

sculpture manufacturing centre in northern China, posed the question as to how contemporary artists can break with art-historical traditions and established art practices and face the common man's hardship and joy.<sup>16</sup> The section of GT2008 that benefited the most from loitering was Independent Projects, which included Tea Pavilion, curated by Dorothee Albrecht, Organising Mutation, curated by Para/Site, and Pool of Possibilities: Mapping Currents, curated by Stina Edblom and the Asia Art Archive. For me, the most rewarding of the Independent Projects was Middle East Channel, curated by Khaled Ramadan, with its brilliant selection of works by leading artists from Bahrain, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey. Other Independent Projects were equally fascinating (Now in Coming, East-South: Out of Sight, and Mornings in Mexico) and exemplified the "lateral curating" mentioned by Sarat Maharaj at the opening press conference, that distinguished GT2008 and enabled dissonant and, at times, irreconcilable voices to cohabit in a harmony without compromise.

The second venue of GT2008 was the Times Museum of Art (TMoA) which is affiliated with the Guangdong Museum of Art. The first community arts museum in Guangzhou, it is located on different floors of an existing high-rise residential building in the Time Roses community on the outskirts of Guangzhou and was designed by the architect Rem Koolhaas. The vistas are stunning, the organization vertical, but it remains reminiscent of some imaginary, Babel-free Brave New World, somewhere on the outskirts of the DDR (the former East German "democratic" republic), designed to convince the *Volk* that modernity had arrived. I found it endearing that the concrete was still wet and that the GT2008 had come to "a vernacular block of flats in an unglamorous area" (Sir David Tang, Founder of Shanghai Tang),<sup>17</sup> but I nevertheless longed for the dense, dementing zones of Disorder and Chaos that had consumed the Guangdong Museum of Art. I longed for the interminable chaos of the waiting rooms of the transit zone. I longed for the nomadic tent that Sarat Maharaj described to me the night before, where one could empty oneself of Isms and open up a civil space in which the self and alternative conceptual continents could flourish.

#### 08 TB: The Taipei Biennial 2008

The flight from Shanghai to Taipei on September 11 (the seventh anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 9/11) had all the characteristics of *The Yellow Flight*. The line between domestic and international was blurred, and it was impossible to "determine whether the travelers were in China or the world at large."<sup>18</sup> Following an agreement between Taiwan and China signed on June 13, 2008, "charter" flights were allowed to operate directly between China and Taiwan, but in September 2008 they were still required to fly through Hong Kong air space.<sup>19</sup> While foreigners were asked to present exit cards to passport control on leaving Shanghai, those holding a Taiwanese passport were not. For them, the flight was domestic; for me, it was an international flight that took a curious, circuitous route. I was reminded of Wu Shanzhuan's statement on the wall of *The Yellow Flight* transit lounge in Guangzhou: "The moment we found out his identity he happened not to be with that identity."

The opening ceremony of the Taipei Biennial 2008 (08TB) at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum that evening was an elegant, outdoor affair, somewhat rain-swept as typhoon Sinlaku neared the island. Following a superb presentation by the indigenous rock stars Wild Fire Music and a performance by the German-Turkish artist Nevin Aladag, the distinguished guests who opened the Biennial under the glare of television cameras included not only the Mayor of Taipei, Hau Lung-bin, but also the Premier of Taiwan, Liu Chao-shiuan, and the President of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou, all of whom made exceptionally well-informed remarks on the Biennial. I was astonished by the degree of importance that the Taipei Biennial had been accorded by every level of government.

The two highly experienced curators who had been assigned responsibility for 08TB were Manray Hsu, from Taipei/Berlin, and Vasif Kortun, from Istanbul. Hsu had previously co-curated the 2000 Taipei Biennial with Jérôme Sans<sup>20</sup> and was consulting curator of the Liverpool Biennial in 2006 together with Gerardo Mosquera.<sup>21</sup> In 2001, Hsu served on the jury of the 49th Venice Biennale. Vasif Kortun, Director of Platform Garanti in Istanbul since 2001, was chief curator of the Istanbul Biennale in 1992 and co-curator in 2005. Among the numerous biennials in which he has participated are the 24th São Paulo Biennial (1998) and the Tirana Biennial (2003). Kortun was also responsible for the Turkish pavilions at the 1994 São Paulo Biennial and 2005 Venice Biennale and was advisor to the first Johannesburg Biennial. The first director of the museum of the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, in the United States, from 1994 to 1997, Vasif Kortun has had a long and influential career, which was acknowledged when he was named the recipient of Bard's ninth annual Award for Curatorial Excellence in 2006.

If in Guangzhou there had been concern about how to deal with the “queries and quandaries” of exhibition and curatorship, in Taipei that was not evident. On the contrary, at both a political and a community level, great expectations had been placed on the two curators. As was noted in the accompanying *Guide Book*, the Taipei Biennial has always been embraced and phenomenally well attended by the citizens of Taipei.<sup>22</sup> The curators of 08TB were not likely candidates for abdicating their roles in orchestrating this important exhibition and, indeed, the 2008 Taipei Biennial was one of the finest choreographed exhibitions I have experienced. Nevertheless, there were a number of interesting correlations between the Guangzhou and Taipei Biennials that deserve closer examination.

As early as 2003, in a panel discussion at the California College of the Arts, in San Francisco,<sup>23</sup> Manray Hsu described the urgent issue of an hierarchical structure by which non-Western artists were classified primarily as “ethnic” or “national” artists. Hsu concluded:

Particularly in North America, multiculturalism since the 1980s, while promoting diversity . . . ghettoized these artists and limited their aesthetic propositions. By confining the framework of interpretation to ethnic culture and history, curating exhibitions of “ethnic” artists actually reinforces the hierarchy of Western and non-Western contemporary art.<sup>24</sup>

Hsu noted that multicultural-ism, neo-international-ism, and cultural nomad-ism tended to ignore “the specificity of localities [while] global curators . . . are eager to project a universal picture of the world culture.” Hsu therefore posed the question: can curating “break down the traditional nation-state structure and the newly formed global yet highly centralized cultural network?”<sup>25</sup>

What the curators of both the Guangzhou and Taipei Biennials succeeded in doing was to challenge the Isms that had cast non-Western artists in subsidiary roles in a conceptual script defined by Western “aesthetic propositions” (Hsu) and “curatorial turns” (Maharaj). Each biennial became a Transit Lounge where one could be identity- and ideology-free. If Guangzhou's triennial had celebrated disorder, confusion, and uproar, Taipei's biennial—situated in an “aperture between nations”—coolly eradicated pathos and, in a slight-of-hand, pretended to hold an identity at bay that, in truth, didn't happen to be around.

If Guangzhou was a course designed for free runners and their extravagant, acrobatic maneuvers, the 08TB was the perfect, tightly choreographed *parkour*<sup>26</sup> for *traceurs* and *traceuses* skilled at



Internacional Errorista, *We are all Errorists*, 2008, installation. Photo: Zheng Shengtian. Courtesy of Internacional Errorista.

overcoming obstacles (above all, ideology) in a time of emergency. Indeed, the very first artwork one encountered on entering the 2008 Taipei Biennial was an installation by the artists' group Internacional Errorista from Argentina. Founded in 2005 in protest against the visit of U.S. President George W. Bush and the Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, the group advocates Errorism—a philosophy of life in which error is seen as a human condition in the capitalist world, and as the principle governing reality. “Failure as perfection, error as appropriate move.”<sup>27</sup> The most outrageous non-analysis of ideology in 08TB was perpetrated by Chitka, an artists' group formed by Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkacova from Prague and Bratislava. Their politically incorrect video, *Dialectics of Subjection # 4*, in which world leaders such as Vladimir Putin are “checked out” by the artists and rated on the basis of their sexual appeal, plays on recent headlines such as “Armed, Half-Naked Putin Excites Gays, Gun-Owners” and “Russian PM Putin Tames the Tiger.”<sup>28</sup>

There were many worthy highlights in 08TB but one work that was exceptional and, indeed, exemplary for the entire Biennial was Roderick Buchanan's *I Am Here* (2007). Two video projections, separated by a wall at the request of the participants, showed two marching bands (the Parkhead Republican Flute Band, which actively campaigns for the “removal of the British presence in Ireland” and The Black Skull Corps of Fife and Drum, a loyalist/union-led flute band whose aim is “to celebrate and preserve the ‘proud British heritage’”). As the artist notes in the *Guide Book* to the Biennial, these bands are “an instrument for the encouragement of loathing and intolerance to invigorate men going into battle.” Completely unexpected was the fact that both bands originate from Scotland, its members Scots of Irish descent. *I Am Here* refers to one of the



Roderick Buchanan, *I Am Here*, 2007, film transferred to video, 50 mins. 23 secs. Courtesy of the artist.



Nevin Aladag, *Familie Tezcan*, 2001, video, 6 mins. 40 secs. Courtesy of the artist, Gitte Weise Gallery, and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



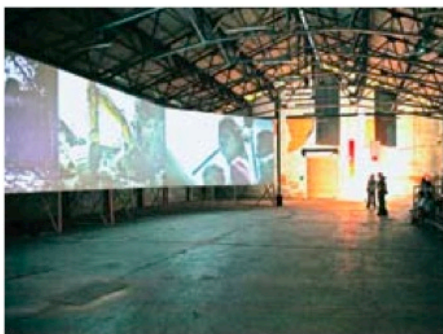
Wei Liu, *A Day to Remember*, 2005, video, 13 mins. Collection Centre Georges Pompidou. Courtesy of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

key themes of 08TB—divided states and micro-nations. It also goes to the heart of identity, as does another exemplary work in the Biennial, Nevin Aladag's *Familie Tezcan*. This joyful, moving work showed an immigrant family living in Germany that negotiates both Turkish and Western culture with extraordinary grace. The father of the family is a professional breakdancer and dance teacher. We saw him and his family dancing and singing in Turkish, Arabic, and English, as the *Guide Book* to 08TB notes, "blissfully at ease with the cultures they breathe on a daily basis."

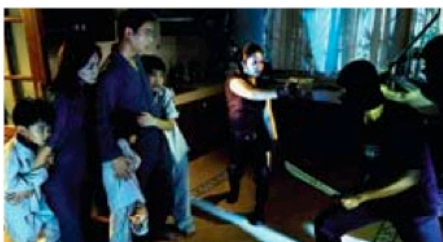
Another convincing project in 08TB was IRWIN's *NSK Passport Office*, where visitors to the Biennial could apply for a NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst/New Slovenian Art) passport. A utopian "micro-nation" that has no physical territory, NSK offers an alternative identity to those "whose identity cannot be confined to or defined in terms of modern nation-statehood." The project, according to the Biennial's *Guide Book*, offers not only a form of belonging to the stateless, but also the potential to inspire those Taiwanese citizens who consider the lack of recognition of an independent Taiwan "as a limitation on the enjoyment of belonging to a nation-state."<sup>29</sup>

A number of the artists chosen by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun to participate in 08TB—including Roderick Buchanan and Nevin Aladag—take on the role of the observer, the anthropologist, and the ethnographer. One of the most powerful works in the Taipei Biennial was Liu Wei's video document *A Day to Remember*, filmed on the sixteenth anniversary of the Tian'anmen Square military crackdown on June 4, 1989. Next to Liu's work, in a curious but effective tandem, was the installation *Estimations*, by the Danish artist Katya Sander. Four windows were set up next to one another, three with screens playing pre-taped video material, the fourth opening up to the view outside. A dubbed, taped conversation could be heard in which actuaries from Taiwanese insurance companies are asked about uncertainty, quantifying the unknown, risk management, and risk control.

The Taipei Biennial, like the Guangzhou Triennial, moved beyond the confines of the host museum, this time into the street, into the subway, and onto the premises of the first beer factory in Taiwan, built during the Japanese occupation. While the installation of *Welfare State/Smashing the Ghetto*, by the Spanish artists' group Democracia, at the Taipei Brewery was particularly strong, I must confess to finding Wong Hoy Cheong's installations in the Zhongxiao Xinsheng MRT (subway) station more subversive. Born in Malaysia but educated in the United States, Wong created a series of large-scale photographs titled *Maid in Malaysia* that slipped easily into



*Democracia, Welfare State/Smashing the Ghetto, 2007, four-channel video installation, 12 mins. 43 secs. Courtesy of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.*



*Wong Hoy Cheong, Maid in Malaysia Series: Lara Croft, 2008, lightbox, 158 x 308 cm. Courtesy of the artist.*

the exact format and style of subway advertising. Commissioned by the 2008 Taipei Biennial, the series shows maids working in Malaysia posing as different female icons from history, music, film, and television (Florence Nightingale, Jeannie, Mary Poppins, Madonna, Supergirl, Virgin Mary and Lara Croft).

Did the 2008 Taipei Biennial offer an alternative conceptual continent? Did it see itself as being situated in a post-West world? In the political context of Taiwan, such questions sound distinctly ideological. The apparent dichotomy between West (or Other) and East (or Other) was in a slow fade in 08TB. Both Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, as well as many of the artists in 08TB, move easily among any number of conceptual, cultural, and political universes, living multilayered lives with alternating identities and languages, not necessarily sure which one they happen to have

with them on any one day. Like the Tezcan family introduced to us by Nevin Aladag, they do so with great joy and with what the curators describe as do-it-yourself practices, humour, and idiosyncrasy.<sup>30</sup> They are quite possibly all permanent residents of some transit lounge, somewhere, convinced that it is temporary.

### SB2008: The Singapore Biennale 2008 and Wonder

The day of my flight to Singapore, September 14, coincided with the Moon Festival (*Zhongqui Jie*) and the arrival of typhoon Sinlaku in Taiwan. All public buildings were closed, my hotel boarded up, the country whipped by torrential rains. Travelling from the centre of the island to the Taipei airport on a 300-kilometer-per-hour high-speed train that flew over rivers whose banks had broken was both dramatic and exhilarating. Neither my companion nor the many passengers trying to reach their families to celebrate the Moon Festival seemed perturbed by the typhoon or by standing in the aisles of the overcrowded train. On the contrary, there was an air of festivity. It was a perfect metaphor for the lessons of the 2008 Taipei Biennial, above all, that life is a *parkour*, an extreme sport, for those skilled at overcoming obstacles and danger. Travelling from the turmoil and devastation of typhoon Sinlaku to the perfumed stillness and tropical languor of the early morning hours in Singapore felt like waking up after an intense fever. SB2008, the Singapore Biennale 2008, would open its doors in a few hours, having warned Singaporeans and tourists alike that they would likely be “wondered” and should be “prepared to be awed” by the Biennale’s marvels, riddles, and illusions.<sup>31</sup> One of the illusions on September 14, 2008, was that the world was in order.

Wonder, the second edition of the Singapore Biennale, followed the inaugural event in 2006, which had been dedicated to Belief. Both Biennales had been curated by the director of the Mori Art Museum, Fumio Nanjo. Like his colleagues in Taipei, Nanjo is highly experienced in the organization of large-scale international exhibitions, having been commissioner of the Japanese Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997, co-curator of the third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia, in 1999, and co-director of the Yokohama Triennale in 2001. Interestingly, Fumio Nanjo had also been the commissioner for the 1998 Taipei Biennial, Site

of Desire. In a commissioner's statement for the 1998 Taipei Biennial, Nanjo described "a century of desire" and an Asia in which cities seek:

a new post-colonial identity as they sculpt modernity. Its economies have grown, heated up and contracted. Its politics are in turmoil and its democracies are beginning to take on unique shapes . . . Tradition is being re-examined and reborn as well as being creatively transmitted. Western modernity is learned from, studied, copied, and denied.<sup>32</sup>

Nanjo also noted in his 1998 Taipei statement that desire, from a religious perspective, represents worldly attachment, as well as karma.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, if we examine the Taipei and Singaporean biennials curated by Fumio Nanjo, we find a theological and sociocultural trilogy dedicated to a passage from desire to belief to wonder. In his introduction to the *Guide* to the 2008 Singapore Biennale, Nanjo pointed out that one might expect that wonder would precede belief, but, he explained, "to engage in wonder after belief means that there is a re-confirmation, with conviction, of one's position in the world."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, he warned, the real may be illusory, and the illusory may become real.<sup>35</sup>



Shigeru Ban, Containerart Pavilion, 2008, architectural installation, Marina Bay, Singapore. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.

Spread over three venues (City Hall, South Beach Development, and Marina Bay), the SB2008 offered numerous ethereal installations where the boundaries between the real and the illusory dissolved. The most spectacular were found in the Containerart Pavilion, situated at the Central Promontory Site, which juts out into Marina Bay. Designed by the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban and occupying 3,200 square metres, the Containerart Pavilion was a transit lounge constructed out of stacked shipping containers and large scale paper tubes. The work, which most clearly offered a "mysterious, wondrous experience," was Hans Op de Beeck's *Location (6)*, a circular observatory in a vast snowy landscape.<sup>36</sup> While Anthony McCall's solid-light film, *Between You and I*, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's *Manas (Utopian City)* explored the sublime, the work inside the pavilion I found most compelling was *Floating*, by Yuan Goang-Ming, from Taiwan. A boat tosses in the waves until it tips over and plunges underwater before righting itself again. This simple video narrative, installed inside one of the containers, provided a claustrophobic metaphor for anxiety and, if one



Hans Op de Beeck, *Location (6)*, 2008, sculptural installation, 18 metres. Courtesy of Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; Galleria Continua, San Gimignano-Beijing; Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna; Ron Mandos, Amsterdam-Rotterdam. Co-produced by the Holland Festival. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.



Alfredo Juan Aquilizan and Maria Isabel Gaudinez-Aquilizan, *Flight*, 2004-08, installation, rubber thong slippers, bamboo, and wind harp. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.



Chaw Ei Thein, Rich Streitmatter-Tran, Aung Ko, *September Sweetness*, 2008, sugar. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.



Felice Varini, *Drill Hall*, 2008, installation. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.



Dinh Q. Le, Quoc Hai Tran, Van Danh Le, *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, 2002-08, homemade full-sized helicopter. Courtesy of the Singapore Biennale.

could hold one's breath long enough, for hope. Outside of the pavilion was one of the signature works of SB2008, *Flight*, by Alfredo Juan Aquilizan and Maria Isabel Gaudinez-Aquilizan. An homage to those who live in economic, political, and cultural exile and whose lives have been torn apart by relocation and dislocation, this work consisted of 4,000 rubber thongs and slippers perched on bamboo poles leading out to sea.

At the South Beach Development, a former ex-army camp built in the 1930s, a number of particularly strong works were presented.<sup>37</sup> Although installations such as Felice Varini's *Drill Hall* remained loyal to the Biennale's central theme of illusion, other works at this venue offered little respite from harsh realities. Two outdoor works at South Beach were among the strongest: *September Sweetness*, by Chaw Ei Thein, Rich Streitmatter-Tran, and Aung Ko, and *The Farmers and the Helicopters*, by Dinh Q. Le, Quoc Hai Tran, and Van Dinh Le. The latter consists of an operable helicopter built by Vietnamese farmers from scrap material and the remnants of abandoned machines. A videotape by Dinh Q. Le shown in the exhibition spaces documented the construction of the helicopter and combined disturbing memories by those who had lived through the Vietnam War with clips from blockbuster movies that had mythologized it. A video still of the reconstructed helicopter, published in the *Guide* to the Biennale, contained a statement that read: "We have to demonstrate our national identity, our capacity, our ability."<sup>38</sup>

The installation *September Sweetness*, a Burmese pagoda constructed out of sugar, is, as the Biennale's *Guide* tells us, a metaphor "for the slow loss of a systemic structure [in Burmese life] that has been in place for centuries."<sup>39</sup> Only days after the official opening of the Biennale, the pagoda had begun to crack and fall to the ground; ants had begun to dismantle the edifice while swarms of bees hovered above. A sign near the pagoda read: "Please note the presence of bees at this site. They are considered to be part of the artwork. Please be mindful of their presence." Also at the South Beach Development was Isak Berbic's *The End of History* (2007), a video assemblage of audio and visual news coverage of the Bosnian War (1992–95) interspersed with chilling audio clips taken from both personal and public archives. Another installation, by Aktan Abdykalykov of Kyrgyzstan, consisted of three films transferred to video: *My little people, let's live in peace!*, *Peace is a prerequisite for happiness*, and *Oh, my dears!* Supported by the Soros Foundation, these films, designed to encourage social harmony, were made between 1995 and 1996 for broadcast on Kyrgyz national television.

While I was wandering through the various venues of the Singapore Biennale, the *New York Times* was preparing its September 15 edition. The headlines would read "Wall St.'s Turmoil Sends Stocks Reeling."<sup>40</sup> The global financial crisis of 2008 was about to unfold. On October 29, the Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, Kishore Mahbubani, would write an article in the *Financial Times* regretting that "in the thousands of words spun in the incestuous western discourse on this crisis, little attention has been paid to Asian views." Nevertheless, he commented, the "really good news is that few Asians have lost their optimism about the future. They have no illusions about the crisis but are confident that they remain on the right trajectory to deliver the Asian century."<sup>41</sup>

Will the Asian century, the post-West century, herald an alternative conceptual continent, as Sarat Maharaj asked, "or simply the desire to step in the West's shoes, to be its rivalrous lookalike—in Milton's phrase, its 'nether empire'?"<sup>42</sup> Did the Guangzhou Triennial, the Taipei Biennial, and the Singapore Biennale provide us with, or at least hint at, a set of new aesthetic propositions for the twenty-first century?



Yang Fudong, *East of Que Village*, 2007, six-screen video installation, 20 mins. 50 secs. Courtesy of ShanghART Gallery.

The Singapore Biennale's "notions of wonder, *mirari*, to wonder at, to marvel, to *miraculum*"<sup>43</sup> and its message of belief both past and present are fundamentals of faith in the East and in the West rather than an alternative conceptual or spiritual proposition. Wonder and Belief will, no doubt, comfort many in this age of crisis, provide certainty and encourage optimism. For me, a child of a secular West steeped in the ideals (if not the reality) of humanism rather than faith, I am convinced that my future depends on my skill as a *traceuse*. The Taipei Biennial provided perfect training in *l'art du déplacement* and endurance, the Guangzhou Triennial offered expertise in extravagant, acrobatic maneuvers through dementing zones of disorder and chaos. But it was the artist Yang Fudong, who asked in the Guangzhou Triennial, and in a parallel and extraordinarily powerful exhibition in Shanghai, how each one of us can face the common man's hardship and joy and not just our own. Yang's six-channel work *East of Que Village*<sup>44</sup> documented a world in which wild dogs and human beings battle for survival in a bitter and barren rural community only ninety kilometers north of Beijing. It was the world of Yang's childhood; it is, and will be, the world of many.

Questions as to whether the Asian century, or a post-West world, will offer alternative conceptual propositions or new forms of vernacular cosmopolitanism distracts us from the reality (proposed in many different forms in the Taipei Biennial) that the inviolability of the nation-state has long been an illusion. New national narratives of culture, nostalgic and compelling as they are, preclude "error as an appropriate [and inevitable] move"<sup>45</sup> and cast power in the leading role rather than our mutual interdependencies and shared responsibilities for the needy and the disenfranchised in a time of distress. What our post-West century does offer is an untamed, rhapsodic "Pandemonium" world seething with queries and quandaries and enriched by multifarious mutations of "cultural characteristics" and aesthetic propositions situated in the apertures between nations.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Accumulations: The Spirit of the East, curated by Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and Yang Shinyi, Asia Art Center Beijing, 798 Art District, August 2–31, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> BBC Report, "China online: Tibet and torch reaction," April 17, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7347821.stm>. According to the report a large number of blogs denounced the "Racist Western Conspiracy to Stop China From Being Successful."

<sup>3</sup> Sarat Maharaj, "Sublimated with Mineral Fury: prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium Asia," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism: The Third Guangzhou Triennial* (Guangzhou: China Fine Art Academy Publishing House, 2008), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Discussion among Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Yang Shinyi, and the artists Huang Gang, Lu Shengzhong, Qui Shihua, and Ye Yongqing, Asia Art Center Beijing, July 4, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Gao Shiming, "Observations and 'Presentiments after Post-Colonialism'," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 39, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Sarat Maharaj, "Sublimated with Mineral Fury: Prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium," 54–55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>10</sup> Gao Shiming, "Observations and 'Presentiments after Post-Colonialism'," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Sarat Maharaj, "Sublimated with Mineral Fury: prelim notes on sounding Pandemonium Asia," 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>13</sup> The four key sections of GT2008 were Projects in Progress, Thinking Room, Free Radicals, and Independent Projects.

- <sup>14</sup> "Thinking Room," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, 166.
- <sup>15</sup> "Wu Shanzhuan, *The Yellow Flight*," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, 241.
- <sup>16</sup> "Yang Fudong, *Cyan Kylin*," *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, 148.
- <sup>17</sup> Press Conference GT2008, September 6, 2008. Sir David Tang is Vice Chairman of the Organizing Committee of GT2008. At a press conference held at the Times Museum of Art, the co-designer of the museum, Alain Fouraux of the office of Rem Koolhaas, described the original building as "an example of the swamp of international buildings where people are forced to commute. We want to show that these buildings can avoid monotonous development on the periphery of the city and that these buildings can in fact support a variety of activities whether it is a museum or a massage parlour. This building was not made to be beautiful or to show our skills."
- <sup>18</sup> For comments on *The Yellow Flight* and the status of Hong Kong in 1995, see Gao Shiming, "Observations and Presentiments 'after Post-Colonialism'," 39.
- <sup>19</sup> On November 4, 2008, a new agreement was signed that allowed Cross Straits flights to travel directly between China and Taiwan, resulting in shorter travel time and lower fuel costs.
- <sup>20</sup> Jérôme Sans was then at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. He is presently Director of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing.
- <sup>21</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, an independent curator based in Havana, is Adjunct Curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. He co-founded the Havana Biennial in 1984.
- <sup>22</sup> Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, "Curators' Statement," *08TB Taipei Biennial Guide Book* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2008), 7.
- <sup>23</sup> Manray Hsu, "On Global Curating," Curating Now, public panel discussion organized by the MA in curatorial Practice, California College of the Arts in San Francisco, October 30, 2003, [sites.cca.edu/curatingarchive/archives/CuratingNow02.doc](http://sites.cca.edu/curatingarchive/archives/CuratingNow02.doc).
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> For information on parkour, see Ethan Todras-Whitehill, "Throwing Yourself Against the Wall," *New York Times*, June 29, 2007, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/06/29/travel/escapes/29Parkour.html?pagewanted=1&dp=1>, and "Parkour," Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkour>.
- <sup>27</sup> "Internacional Errorista," *08TB Taipei Biennial Guide Book*, 40.
- <sup>28</sup> See Spiegel Online International, August 31, 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,503248,00.html>, and *China Daily*, September 1, 2008, <http://english.sina.com/world/p/2008/0901/183123.html>. See also, "Pictures of bare-chested Putin send straight women and gay men in ecstasy," *Pravda*, August 23, 2007, <http://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/23-08-2007/96270-bare-chested-putin-0>.
- <sup>29</sup> "IRWIN," *08TB Taipei Biennial Guide Book*, 56.
- <sup>30</sup> "Curators' Statement," *08TB Taipei Biennial Guide Book*, 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Mel Lam, "Art Invades City Hall," September 15, 2008, published on the Singapore government's Youth.SG Web site, (<http://www.youth.sg/content/view/full/5987/51/>): "Be prepared to be awed at this year's Biennale, and see three buildings transform into exhibition sites for a world of 'marvels, riddles and illusions' . . . Come and be wondered."
- <sup>32</sup> Fumio Nanjo, "Commissioner's Statement: A Century of Desire," 1998 Taipei Biennial: Site of Desire (June 13–September 6, 1998), <http://www.taipeibiennial.org/1998/PRESS.html>.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. "Desire lies at the root of all things. The desires of human beings, state, and ethnic groups or races triggered major wars in the 20th century. Desire also led mankind to great inventions and discoveries. The collapse of communism and the prosperity brought by capitalism are also an inevitable result of human desire. Desire changes daily life, changes cities, and even changes economics and politics. From a religious perspective, it represents worldly attachment, as well as karma. But it is also a wellspring for human progress and potential."
- <sup>34</sup> Fumio Nanjo, "Artistic Director on The Art of Wonder," *Guide: Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder* (Singapore: National Arts Council, 2008), 12.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>36</sup> "Hans Op de Beeck," *Guide: Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder*, 168.
- <sup>37</sup> The Beach Road Camp was used for the greater part of the twentieth century as the headquarters of Singapore's volunteer defence forces. The complex also includes the former Beach Road police station.
- <sup>38</sup> "Dinh Q. Le, Quoc Hai Tran and Van Danh Le," *Guide: Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder*, 120.
- <sup>39</sup> "Chaw Ei Thein, Rich Streitmatter-Tran and Aung Ko," *Guide: Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder*, 140.
- <sup>40</sup> Alex Berenson, "Wall St.'s Turmoil Sends Stocks Reeling," *New York Times*, September 15, 2008.
- <sup>41</sup> "Why Asia stays calm in the storm," *Financial Times*, October 29, 2008, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0015ba10-a4fb-11dd-b4f5-000077b07658.html?ncklick\\_check=1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0015ba10-a4fb-11dd-b4f5-000077b07658.html?ncklick_check=1). The bitterness expressed by Mahbubani was also evident at a meeting of the Group of 20 finance ministers and central bankers on November 8, 2008, in Brazil, where the spread of financial calamity around the world was blamed on the United States and on the "excessive profits" of Wall Street. Alexei Barrionuevo, "Demand for a Say on a Way Out of Crisis," *New York Times*, November 9, 2008.
- <sup>42</sup> Sarat Maharaj, "Sublimated with Mineral Fury," 52.
- <sup>43</sup> Wall text, Singapore Biennale 2008.
- <sup>44</sup> Yang Fudong, East of Que Village, ShangART Gallery, Shanghai, September 7–October 12, 2008.
- <sup>45</sup> "Internacional Errorista," *08TB Taipei Biennial Guide Book*, 40.

## ■ 08 Taipei Biennial

Frederika Whitehead

It is hardly surprising that it would be difficult to find a work in the 2008 Taipei Biennial that could be exhibited in mainland China. Most of the works are simply too politically charged. Several people who visited the Shanghai Biennale en route to Taipei, which opened a few days earlier, noted the gulf between the two exhibitions, one describing the Shanghai Biennale as 'bland in comparison'.

Especially irksome to the Chinese would be Tiananmen survivor Liu Wei's video *A Day to Remember*, 2005. It is a moving film that bears many repeat viewings. Wei's ambition is to break the silence imposed by the government about the military crack-down on student protestors on June 4, 1989. On the anniversary of the massacre Wei spent the day walking the streets around Beijing University and Tiananmen Square. With his camera in hand he asked person after person if they knew what the date was and what day it was. The film begins light-heartedly in the morning; some respondents quite genuinely seemed not to know what he was getting at and became quite giggly in front of the camera. As the sun heats up others seem more aggravated and refuse to talk to him. Some try to evade the question. Some choose to lie and do so with varying degrees of success – some shamefacedly, some just plain badly. Several complain about the camera, and one man gets angry and demands to know what unit Wei is from. At dusk he finally finds one weary-looking female student who gives him an answer. She tells him that it is the anniversary of the student strike. He asks her 'Will you say a few words about it?' She replies, 'No, absolutely not', and turns away.

Other governments are put on trial with equal force. Curators Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun have invited Oliver Ressler to curate a show within the biennale. 'A World Where Many Worlds Fit' is dedicated to counter-globalisation movements. A cacophony of videos and graphic images document protests at meetings of the G8 and other global organisations. Allan Sekula's slideshow *Waiting for Teargas* 1999, includes the images that we are all sadly too familiar with: police in full riot gear tear-gassing protestors who have only bandanas to pro-

tect their faces. Other films show the lighter moments of protesting: Nuria Vila and Marcelo Expósito have sought and collated images of protestors who have used costume and performance. The costumed performances serve to entertain, to alter the relationships at the demonstrations, or simply to play out a small piece of theatre for all to see. The symbolism of the man in a pink tutu dusting a tank during a protest in *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance*, 2007, is particularly loaded.

Back in the main exhibition The Yes Men's acerbic and very funny parodies of global businesses and the American government are a joy to watch. Their trick is to pose as representatives of a particular global brand and slowly ramp up the claims for their product until they become quite preposterous. The credulity of the unwitting audiences is stretched until it breaks. Its most famous victim so far has been BBC World. The channel believed one of The Yes Men when he posed as a representative from the Dow chemical company and interviewed him on air. In the interview he said that Dow – now owners of the Union Carbide plant that released 40 tonnes of toxic gas into the atmosphere in 1984, killing 3,800 instantly and leaving 100,000 with chronic illnesses – was accepting responsibility for the Bhopal disaster. The news channel ran two cycles of the interview and Dow's stock lost £2bn on the German exchange. Two monitors run side-by-side in the gallery, with a big comfy sofa to suggest home television viewing. One shows the BBC World interview and the second shows the crummy stage set of an office from which the supposed Dow representative was speaking.

The main venue for the biennale is the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, which is one of the most iconic and impressive modern buildings in Taipei. Outside the Biennale the art world in Taipei is smaller than those in Shanghai or Beijing but still vibrant. There is not the same goldrush as is presently occurring on the mainland, or the same volume of speculation in the market – although good sales were recorded at Art Taipei 2008 in September with \$23.5m worth of works sold. Footfall was up to 72,000 visitors – 4,000 more than visited Frieze Art Fair last year. Taiwan is a wealthy country and Taiwanese collectors have played a substantial part in the art market boom on the mainland. The art scene in Taipei is well funded and supported by the Taiwanese government. Ma Ying-jeou, president of Taiwan, has been mayor of Taipei and during that

time he was a regular fixture at art parties.

In terms of artist-run/artist-orientated spaces the most famous include IT Park, VT Salon and the Taipei artist village. IT Park is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Its reputation as a trail-blazer stems from the fact that it was one of the first galleries to champion installation and new media art. This gallery is architecturally beautiful with cutaways in the walls that flood the interior galleries with light. It is currently showing Michael Lin. VT Salon a few doors down is a gallery with a hip bar attached. Taipei artist village is situated in a former government office building – the building lay empty for many years until the Cultural Affairs Bureau took it over in 2001 – and now houses an extensive residential studio programme and operates exchange programmes with 30 similar organisations worldwide, including Gasworks and the British Council visiting artists scheme.

Some of the best known commercial galleries include Main Trend, Dynasty, Grand Siècle and AKI. Main Trend is a huge space off the Cheng De Rd, it represents Wu Tien-chang and Chen Chieh-jen, two of Taiwan's 'fab four', the other two artists being Yang Mao-lin and Hou Chun-ming. Taiwan Panorama described the quad as part of 'the post-martial-law "Museum Generation" '.

Grand Siècle deals exclusively in new media art and is currently showing Chen Wen-Chi. Many saw fit to comment on the dominance of new media art in the biennale but, given the prevalence it has within the main galleries, it seems appropriate that the biennale would in some way reflect this. It is a strong biennale, because it feels well-rooted in the local scene. More new media art was to be found at MOCA in its third digital arts festival which opened on the same day as the biennale. So far so cohesive, except that on the day that I had earmarked to visit it Taipei was hit by typhoon Sinlaku 147mph winds and torrential rains causing the Taiwanese to batten down the hatches. It seems that even the strongest and most cohesive of art groups can be blown shut by strong winds from outside.

**08 Taipei Biennial** is at Taipei Fine Arts Museum and various venues from September 13 to January 4.

FREDERIKA WHITEHEAD is assistant editor of *Art Monthly*.



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GWANGJU/TAIPEI

## LE BIENNALI DI GWANGJU E TAIPEI

Anna Daneri

Giunte rispettivamente alla settima e sesta edizione, le Biennali di Gwangju e Taipei offrono interessanti spunti di riflessione sullo stato dell'arte oggi. Accomunate nella scelta dei curatori di non ricorrere a un tema conduttore, nella consapevolezza dell'impossibilità di "incasellare" rigidamente la complessità della società contemporanea e dei molteplici riflessi, risposte e strategie attuate globalmente dagli artisti, le due mostre attuano strategie profondamente diverse nella scelta dei percorsi: poetico-visionari a Gwangju, politico-resistenti a Taipei. Curata da Okwui Enwezor, congiuntamente a un team di curatori internazionali composto da Ranjit Hoskote, Hyunjin Kim, Patrick D. Flores, Jang Un Kim, Abdelah Karroum, Sung-Hyen Park e Claire Tancons, la Biennale di Gwangju punta sul concetto di autorialità collettiva che possa rendere conto di una "transregionalità critica, che configuri nuovi continenti di affinità corrispondenti ai nostri desideri e aspirazioni in modo più genuino delle finzioni geografiche, puramente fisiche e sostitutive"; "quando mostriamo, raccontiamo e leggiamo attraverso le culture, non solo attraversiamo differenze culturali, ma anche diverse relazioni tra poetiche e politiche, tra espressività e criticità, formulate dai vari artisti" (Ranjit Hoskote).

L'intento di operare una ricognizione capillare sul presente

dell'arte, seguendo linee di criticità che sembrano sviluppare e superare l'approccio più prettamente politico dispiegato nella documenta XI, porta Enwezor e tutto il team della biennale a concepire una struttura curatoriale operativa secondo un concetto non-unitario, né tantomeno univoco, di spazio e di tempo. Da qui la scelta di intitolarla "Annual Report", con sezioni che fluidamente la compongono e che dispiegano alcune delle mostre più significative realizzate in musei, gallerie, spazi non profit durante i diciotto mesi precedenti alla biennale ("On the Road"), alcuni esperimenti curatoriali focalizzati ("Position Papers") e un buon numero di progetti commissionati *ad hoc* ("Insertions"). Questo sguardo aperto e articolato trova eco nelle opere in mostra dei 127 artisti invitati, accomunate da una forza poetica che sembra rispondere allo *statement* di apertura della mostra: "l'arte dovrebbe essere abbastanza flessibile da agire come indice per il futuro e come riflessione sulle realtà del presente nella ricerca di una nuova consapevolezza fondata sulla libertà e l'immaginazione".

Nelle sedi di mostra disseminate in città, tra cui troviamo anche un cinema, il Museo Uijae dedicato al maestro dell'arte moderna coreana e un mercato tradizionale che i progetti della biennale intendono rivitalizzare sul lungo periodo, si dispiegano tanti universi visivi e visionari, tra cui ricordiamo la struggente installazione di Isaac Julien sulla tragedia dei migranti annegati nel mar di Sicilia (*Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007), il percorso al buio di Ken Lum, l'installazione di tappeti e disegni di Stefano Arienti (*The Asian Shore*, 2007), i piccoli e intensi quadri di Praeet Soi (*Distaster of war*, 2007), il video surreale e straniante di Nina Fischer & Maroan El Sani (*Spelling Dystopia*, 2008) e le opere e performance dei giovani artisti cubani allievi di Tania Bruguera (*Arte de Conducta*). Ma è forse l'esperimento cura-



Karyn Olivier, *Grey Hope*, 2008. Veduta della performance. Foto: Akiko Ota.  
A sinistra: Irwin, *NSK Passport Office*, 2007-2008. Veduta dell'installazione.

to da Claire Tancons, di organizzare una mostra in forma di parata-manifestazione attingendo alle pratiche sovversive del carnevale (*Spring*), che incarna in modo più profondo lo spirito della Biennale di Gwangju, fin dai motivi ultimi della sua fondazione, andando a ripercorrere i luoghi della sanguinosa rivolta popolare del maggio 1980 contro la dittatura. Contando su mezzi sicuramente più limitati di Gwangju (seconda per budget e visitatori a documenta) la Biennale di Taipei, curata da Manray Hsu e Vasif Kortun, presenta opere in gran parte prodotte per l'occasione, che indagano il presente ed esplorano possibili alternative per il futuro. La scelta di lasciare i muri di separazione tra i lavori non "finiti" denota la volontà dei curatori di concentrarsi sull'essenzialità, al di là di una vuota concezione di bello, e sulla necessità di un approccio ecologico, di resistenza dal basso, nei confronti della realtà. Anche a Taipei la città è coinvolta diffusivamente con opere che si misurano con la fabbrica di birra in funzione, come l'installazione

Joachim Schoenfeldt, *Sketch for Four Musicians* (moo, roar, chee-ow, yeeeh), 2008. Materiali vari. Courtesy AOP, Johannesburg. © Joachim Schoenfeldt.



# FOCUS TAIPEI. POLITICA, GLOBALITÀ E ESPOSIZIONI SU LARGA SCALA FOCUSING ON TAIPEI. POLITICS, GLOBALISM AND LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITIONS

Conversazione tra / Conversation between Vasif Kortun, Marco Scotini e / and Elvira Vannini a cura di / by Elvira Vannini

UNA CONVERSAZIONE CON VASIF KORTUN E MARCO SCOTINI SUL RAPPORTO TRA ARTE E POLITICA PROPOSTO DALLA VI BIENNALE DI TAIPEI, SULL'EMERGENZA DI NUOVI FORMATI CULTURALI, SULL'IMPATTO DELLA GLOBALIZZAZIONE SUI SISTEMI ESPOSITIVI, SUL RUOLO DEL CURATORE, ATTRAVERSO UNA CONFIGURAZIONE DI TEMI CORRELATI AL DISPLAY, L'ARCHIVIO E LE SUE FENOMENOLOGIE IN RELAZIONE AL PROLIFERARE DELLE GRANDI MOSTRE IN GIRO PER IL MONDO, ANCHE NEI LUOGHI LONTANI DALLA GEOPOLITICA DELL'ARTE

EV *Le esposizioni internazionali su larga scala, le Biennali "periferiche", o cosiddette postcoloniali, si sono diffuse in diverse aree geografiche. In che modo attuano una messa in discussione degli standard, delle concezioni teoriche e delle pratiche curatoriali, come sono cambiati i dispositivi espositivi?*

VK Posso dire onestamente che negli ultimi venti anni il format espositivo in generale si è trasformato, passando da una presentazione tradizionale e accademica di opere individuali e autonome da cui proprio l'autore veniva tenuto lontano, a modelli diversi che utilizzano sistemi espositivi innovativi, processi, iniziative basate sulla ricerca, contestualità, ibridazione, politica. Nulla va dato per scontato, e l'esposizione non è più sinonimo di chiusura. Ad essere cambiata è anche la percezione classica del white cube. In qualche modo, molti dei cambiamenti, precursori dei nuovi modelli espositivi, provengono dalla storia sebbene essi fossero stati messi da parte, e adesso sono sempre più a disposizione di coloro che intendono rivalutarli. Credo nel sistema Biennale che, finché si affida al rischio e alla sperimentazione, può costituire un porto sicuro rispetto ai modelli commerciali dominanti, dalle fiere alle scuole stesse. Forniscono inoltre una sorta di spazio libero per artisti le cui pratiche, per diverse ragioni, non possono essere valutate dalle gallerie.

EV *Parlando della grande mostra globale, Catherine David è la prima ad introdurre, a partire da Documenta X, la formula dell'evento d'arte contemporanea come*

*"stato d'agitazione". L'esposizione è una continua ridefinizione dello spazio del curatore e dell'arte nella società attuale, e parte da un assunto politico. L'evento si realizzava nel museo, nella città, nella piattaforma dei 100 giorni di dibattito e nel catalogo, per definire il contesto politico dell'attività artistica alla fine del XX secolo. Nell'alleanza tra pratiche discorsive e istanze attiviste, il display non può essere neutro, allora che format dovrebbe assumere?*

MS Non parlerei tanto di "alleanza" tra istanze attiviste e pratiche artistiche perché con questo termine si intende un "patto comune in vista di obiettivi comuni". Al contrario direi che il nesso è a monte. È piuttosto uno sfondo comune, una base comune ad emergere. Uno spazio indistinto che impedisce di tracciare chiaramente i confini tra forze e segni, tra linguaggio e lavoro, tra produzione intellettuale e azione politica. E tutto ciò emerge in una nuova maniera che neppure Benjamin avrebbe sospettato. E con Benjamin tutto il discorso messo insieme tra avanguardie artistiche e avanguardie politiche della Modernità. Lì era ancora possibile parlare di "alleanza" ma non più adesso. In questo senso forse il merito maggiore di Documenta X è stato quello di dichiarare la mostra come format ormai insufficiente a rappresentare le nuove istanze. Le quali avrebbero richiesto – altrimenti – una pluralità di modelli, di spazi e di tempi eterogenei per poter divenire un dispositivo culturale all'altezza dei tempi. Dunque la posta in gioco della mostra è oggi quella di proporsi come una macchi-



Taipei, Beer Factory, location della Taipei Biennial 2008

na complessa a "n" determinazioni, a temporalità variabili, a differenti regimi di segni. Ma il problema principale mi pare rimanga quello di definire perché questi segni sono estetici e politici allo stesso tempo. Nonostante tutte le Biennali e le mostre sul rapporto tra arte e politica quasi nessuno ha cercato di proporre il problema nella sua radicalità. E, nel novanta per cento dei casi, il problema è stato risolto nello sviluppo di una tendenza dell'arte tra tutte le altre tendenze a cui l'industria culturale ci ha abituato. Ma non è così. In palio ci sono nuovi paradigmi e non forme nuove. Più volte ho cercato di spiegare il fenomeno a partire dalla trasformazione del lavoro, della produzione e della forza-lavoro. Ora preferisco riaffrontare il quesito dal punto di vista del potere. La situazione non muta. In breve, il fatto che il capitalismo non organizzi più soltanto "il tempo del lavoro" ma "il tempo della vita" fa sì che sia impossibile determinare un "fuori", un'esteriorità come tale, rispetto ai rapporti capitalistici. L'arte che, per statuto, ha cercato di rappresentare sempre questo "fuori" (e nel discorso conservatore è ancora riaffermato) diventa proprio ora il nuovo terreno di scontro politico, quale terreno per eccellenza del lavoro immateriale. E se un'alternativa c'è, è quella degli spazi interstiziali, quella che non rivendica questo "fuori", che non ha la pretesa assurda di

EV *Large-scale international exhibitions, "peripheral" or so-called postcolonial Biennials, have spread in various geographical areas. In what way do they raise question on standards, theoretical conceptions and curatorial practices and how have the exhibition formats changed?*

VK I can confidently say that the general exhibition format in the last 20 years has transformed from one that was traditionally a scholarly presentation of individual and autonomous works from which even the maker would be distanced to different models that engage innovative exhibition models, processes, research-based initiatives, contextuality, hybridization, politics. Nothing has to be taken for granted, and the Exhibition no longer represents closure. What has as changed too is the classical perception of the white cube. Anyhow, many of the changes, the progenitors of new exhibition models, are in fact from history, although such models were swept under the carpet, and are now increasingly made available to those who want to bring them back. I believe in the biennial format which as long it lends itself to risk and experimentation it can provide a haven from commercial models that take over the panorama from the art-fair to even the art schools themselves. They also provide a kind of liberated space for artists whose practice may not be valued by galleries for many reasons.

EV *Talking about the great global Exhibition, Catherine David was the first who, starting from*

*Documenta X, applied the formula "state of agitation" to a contemporary art event. The Exhibition is a continuous redefinition of the space of the curator and art in today's society, it starts from a political assumption. The event took place in the museum, in the city, in the 100 day-debate platform and in the catalogue, just to define the political context of the artistic activity at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the alliance between discursive practices and activist issues, the display cannot be neutral, so what kind of format should it take?*

MS I would not speak of "alliance" between activist issues and artistic practices because this term indicates a "common pact for common aims". I would say, instead, that the connection is at the source. It is a common background, a common base that emerges. An undetermined space which prevents from clearly tracing the boundaries between forces and signs, language and work, intellectual production and political action. And all that emerges in a new way that also Benjamin would have never imagined. And with Benjamin, all the debate about the artistic and political avant-gardes of Modernity. At that time it was still possible to speak of "alliance", today not anymore. In this sense, maybe the greatest merit of Documenta X was that of declaring the exhibition as an insufficient format for representing new issues. These needed, in fact, a variety of models, spaces and heterogeneous

difenderlo dal mercato, che non reclama il potere come tale, ma fa altro. I modi sono quelli delle pratiche costituenti e questo spazio interstiziale è quello dell'attivismo. EV *La diffusione dei modelli neo-liberali di globalizzazione ha investito le Biennali. In fondo l'organizzazione di una mostra internazionale rappresenta l'esercizio di un "soft power" da parte dell'apparato politico, economico e istituzionale del paese ospitante. Hanno implicazioni geopolitiche?*

VK Senza altro, le Biennali possono, volenti o nolenti, favorire la promozione della città. Non c'è nulla di fondamentalmente sbagliato nel rinvigorire la vita della città attraverso le biennali, curatori e artisti devono anche rendersi conto del contesto in cui operano e vincere il sogno della Capitale e lo status quo. Quanto meno potrebbero proporre tali istanze a un pubblico più ampio. Che la Biennale faccia parte di un contesto neo-liberale non significa che sia una istituzione neo-liberale. EV *Sempre la David suggerisce quanto le pratiche artistiche contemporanee non possano corrispondere alle condizioni per cui il white cube è stato creato: "Le esposizioni su larga scala, determinanti nel presentare se stesse in alternativa al museo, tentano di dar voce alle culture, le storie e le politiche sottorappresentate dalle Istituzioni." Pensate allora che le Biennali possono rappresentare il canale alternativo rispetto alla cultura "mainstream"?*

VK Non esattamente, ma io non seguo i media mainstream. I media sono un qualcosa di molto più democratico e aperto. Chiunque abbia la curiosità di leggere oltre la notizia, tra le righe, e oltre le interpretazioni soggettive degli eventi, può farlo via web. L'Arte come alternativa alla cultura mainstream opererebbe sempre all'interno di quel modello dualistico, diventando mainstream art. Chi desidera un nuovo Warhol giapponese? Non io. MS Se è vero che le Biennali ormai diffuse ad ogni latitudine possono rappresentare un'alternativa al museo e alle forme tradizionali dell'esposizione o della curatela, non è altrettanto vero che, di per sé, possano garantire una fuoriuscita dalla cultura mainstream, se con questa si intende quella dell'industria culturale. Bisogna fare attenzione. I dispositivi culturali delle società disciplinari come la nostra mirano a contenere le funzioni intellettuali e creative all'interno della cornice del capitale.

Addirittura, senza intaccare il loro potenziale critico e trasformativo, utilizzano e canalizzano i nuovi modi di espressione nei processi di valorizzazione capitalista e nel governo dei pubblici e della società. Le imprese del mercato e le istituzioni dello Stato sono sempre pronte a monetizzare i desideri artistici e culturali del pubblico piegando le Biennali a imprese per alimentare l'industria del turismo e quella del tempo libero o, addirittura per vendere stili di vita occidentale su scala globale. Le città-museo da un lato (dove si conserva la cultura) e le città-esposizioni dall'altro (dove si promuove la cultura) ne sono un esempio. Tutto è tollerato e incentivato se non intacca il regime di proprietà. E le forme con cui si continua a proporre l'arte nelle sue vesti neo-arcaiche – per dirla con Lazzarato – non minacciano certo le distribuzioni classiche del lavoro: l'autore/artista, la proprietà intellettuale, l'opera, il mercato battuto a suon di aste, l'ebbrezza delle fiere d'arte, etc, etc. Anche qui, parlare dell'attivismo aprirebbe altre possibilità.... Ma possibilità che non hanno luoghi prescritti d'intervento.

EV *Disobedience è un Archivio in progress in accezione foucaultiana, una geografia frattalica, orizzontale, della disobbedienza civile, delle lotte politico-sociali, delle rivendicazioni dal basso, dei nuovi protagonisti, delle fenomenologie della scena artistica emergente. Lo storage come metafora del processo di costruzione della mostra è tra le ragioni per cui il concetto stesso di archivio è così problematico e interessante oggi, e Disobedience focalizza una tipologia di display che di volta in volta si configura come un attraversamento dell'Archivio: nelle prossime tappe itineranti – il 4 ottobre a Zagabria nel Mestrovic Pavilion e l'11 novembre al Riga Arts Center – con quali modalità verrà allestito e "messo in scena" l'archivio-video?*

MS *Disobedience* nasce nel 2004, quando appariva finito il ciclo dei movimenti anti-liberisti e globali che avevano assunto straordinari caratteri di intellettualità collettiva e di funzione creativa, aprendosi trasversalmente a diversi modi di fare, di espressione, di socialità. Si trattava invece di raccogliere e mostrare una proliferazione molecolare di laboratori creativi – di conflitto e resistenza – e di fabbriche sociali che, al contrario, erano sempre più presenti e diffusi a varie latitudini e attivi nei più diversi ambiti. Dare visibilità a questi eventi, fuori dei



Taipei, Arena, location della Biennale di Taipei 2008

modi dominanti di costruire la storia, significava aprire una piattaforma concreta, mobile, aperta, disponibile ai pubblici. Una scatola degli attrezzi da usare, piuttosto che una videoteca da guardare. L'archivio appariva il dispositivo più appropriato a queste esigenze perché si trattava di dare una forma all'eterogeneità, alla discontinuità, a differenti regimi di segni ed eventi che dovevano pur confrontarsi tra loro, trovare spazi comuni, modelli comuni, linguaggi comuni. Una rete, in sostanza, dove entrano in contatto regimi del visibile e dell'enunciabile. Si trattava e si tratta di definire per via empirica ed esperienziale i modi della disobbedienza oggi, come condizione di azione della moltitudine. Mettere in mostra l'archivio, renderlo disponibile ai differenti usi, significava però affidarne – di volta in volta – il display a persone che fanno dell'archivio, della mediazione culturale, il proprio ambito di lavoro.

Nomeda e Gediminas Urbonas, still da *Pro-test lab archive*, 2005-2007



times in order to become a culturally up-to-date device. So, the Exhibition's challenge today is that of setting itself up as a complex machine, with infinite definitions, variable temporalities and different hierarchies of signs. But the main problem, I think, is that of defining why these signs are aesthetical and political at the same time. In spite of all Biennials and exhibitions on the relationship between art and politics, almost nobody has tried to present the problem in its radicalism. And, in 90 percent of cases, the problem has been solved with the development of an art tendency among all the other tendencies to which the cultural industry has accustomed us. But it is not this way. At stake are new paradigms and not new forms. I have often tried to explain the phenomenon starting from the transformation of work, production and manpower. Now I prefer to reconsider the problem from the point of view of power. The situation does not change. In short, the fact that capitalism does not organise only the "time of work" but also the "time of life" makes it impossible to determine an "outside", an exteriority in itself in comparison with capitalistic relationships. Art which, by its nature, has always aimed at representing this "outside" (and in the traditional vision it is still reaffirmed) just now becomes the new political arena, the field par excellence of immaterial work. If there is an alternative, this is that of the interstitial spaces, that which does not claim this "outside", which has not the absurd demand to

preserve it from the market, which does not claim power in itself, but does other things. The modes are that of constituent practices and the interstitial space is that of activism.

EV *The diffusion of neo-liberal models of globalisation has involved Biennials. Indeed, the organisation of an international exhibition represents the exercise of a soft power by the political, economical and institutional system of the hosting country. Do they have geopolitical implications?*

VK Undoubtedly, the Biennials may play into the hands of city promotion, consciously or unconsciously. While there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the empowerment of a city's life through biennials, curators and artists must also be aware of the context they go into and frustrate the desire of the Capital and the status quo. At best, they may open these questions to the larger public. That the Biennial is in a neo-liberal context, does not mean it is a neo-liberal institution.

EV *David warns how the contemporary artistic practices cannot correspond to the conditions the white cube was created for: "Large scale exhibitions, decisive in presenting themselves as an alternative to the museum, try to give voice to cultures, histories and politics that are underrepresented by the institutions". Do you believe then that Biennials can represent an alternative to mainstream culture?*

VK Not really, but I do not follow mainstream media. Media is much more democratic and open.

EV *"Dietro ogni Utopia c'è sempre un grande disegno tassonomico" diceva Perec ossessionato da elenchi e classificazioni. Rispetto alle strategie caotiche neoliberiste e alla contingenza delle pratiche di resistenza, cosa intendi per Disobbedienza? C'è ancora spazio per l'Utopia, in relazione al rapporto dell'Archivio con la Storia e la Memoria?*

MS No, per fortuna, la figura dell'Utopia appartiene alla nostra memoria, felice o infelice, di Moderni. Ma, comunque, di un passato si tratta. L'Utopia presuppone sempre un "fuori", uno spazio in cui rifondare tutto: la tela bianca, la tabula rasa, il grado zero. Per noi questo spazio "meraviglioso e liscio", per dirla con Foucault, è stato riassorbito integralmente dentro l'organizzazione capitalistica della nostra vita. L'interstizio spaziale e il "qui e ora" temporale sono le nostre alternative all'Utopia. Come mi diceva Virno qualche tempo fa: "Non è più l'ideale di per sé in-attingibile dell'utopia: ora noi viviamo un tempo in cui semmai ci scontriamo con l'assoluta realtà dell'ideale, con la sua tangibilità". Dire di No, disobbedire, disertare non fanno altro che confrontarsi con questo.

EV *Spesso il sistema Biennale si rivolge al circuito inter-*



Harun Farocki e Andrei Ujica, still da *Videograms of a Revolution*, 1992

*nazionale dell'arte. Come si possono auspicare pratiche artistiche e curatoriali "situate", che spieghino e rivelino anche il contesto politico-sociale che attraversano, senza seguire modelli esistenti ma traendo nuovi paradigmi di curatela? Come rispondere a queste urgenze? In che modo il contenuto dell'opera o la permanenza dell'artista offrono nuove possibilità di immaginazione e/o di azione alle comunità locali?*

VK Non mi ha mai interessato curare una Biennale per

un pubblico di professionisti di un luogo che non la ospitava. Ecco perché il tipo di pubblicazioni di Biennali di cui mi occupo non funzionano come i biglietti da visita per i miei colleghi. Abbiamo bisogno di Biennali più "lente" che consentano agli artisti di avere una base concreta nella città che visitano, più procedimento anziché un veloce turnover. Non amo gli impegni superficiali mordi e fuggi, e ho ruoli editoriali in qualità di curatore. EV *Quale la ricaduta sulle produzioni culturali dei global network attivati dalle Biennali nello specifico campo di forze in cui sono localizzate?*

VK Credo veramente che l'istituzione Biennale sia oggi "liberata", nel senso che il tipo di pressione che ha dovuto affrontare negli anni Novanta nell'orientare apertamente il luogo in modo da catapultare un talento locale verso possibilità e aspettative più ampie oggi non è più richiesto. Oggi, il mondo dell'arte contemporanea è rigorosamente diffuso sul network. Il malessere generale è causato dalle aspettative su come questo mondo debba interpretare e occupare quel particolare luogo tendente al contesto relativamente nuovo dell'industria del tempo libero. Non è ovunque la stessa cosa ma tale potenzialità sta già avendo un'azione corruttiva.

Anyone who has the curiosity to read around the news, between the lines and the individual interpretations of events can do so via the web. Art as an alternative to mainstream media would still operate within that dualistic model and become mainstream art. Who wants the next Japanese Warhol? I don't. MS If it is true that Biennials now spreading all over the world can represent an alternative to the museum and to the traditional forms of exhibition and curatorship, it is not so true that they itself can guarantee an exit from mainstream culture, in sense of the culture industry. We have to be careful. The cultural devices of such a disciplinary society like ours, aim at maintaining the intellectual and creative functions within the framework of the capital. Without dipping into their critical and transformative potential, they even use and channel the new ways of expression into the processes of capitalist promotion and into the rule of the public and society. The market enterprises and the state institutions are always ready to commercialise artistic and cultural desires of the public, transforming biennials into enterprises in order to nurture the tourism and leisure industry or even sell western lifestyles on global scale. The city-museum, on one hand, (where culture is preserved) and the city-exhibition, on the other, (where culture is promoted) are an example of this. Everything is admitted and provided if it does not dip into the regime of property. And the ways in which art continues to be proposed in its neo-archaic form, as Lazzarato states, do not potentially menace the classical distributions of work: the author/artist, the intellectual property, the work, the auction market, the thrill of art fairs, etc. Also in this case, speaking of activism would open other possibilities... But possibilities that do not have specific places of intervention.

EV *Disobedience is an Archive in progress according to Foucault's point of view, a fractal and horizontal geography of civil disobedience, socio-political struggles, demands of the lower classes, of the new protagonists and phenomenology of the up and coming artistic scene. The storage as a metaphor of the process of arrangement of the exhibition, is one of the reasons why the concept of archive itself is so problematic and interesting today; Disobedience focuses on a kind of display which each time is characterised by a walk through the Archive: in the next touring stages – October 4 at the Mestrovic Pavilion in Zagreb and November 11 at the Riga Arts Centre – how will the video archive be arranged and exhibited?*

MS *Disobedience* was begun in 2004, when the cycle of the anti-liberal and global movements seemed to have come to an end, movements that had taken the features of collective intellectuality and creative function, transversally opened towards different ways of action, expression and sociality. It was instead a question of gathering and showing a molecular proliferation of creative laboratories – of struggle and resistance – and social factories that, on the contrary, were even more present and widespread far and wide and active in various fields. Highlighting these events, out of the dominant ways to write history, signified opening a concrete platform, mobile, open, at the public's disposal. A toolbox to be used, instead of a video library to look at. The archive seemed to be the most appropriate means, because one had to give form to heterogeneity, discontinuity, to different hierarchies of

signs and events that had to confront, to find common spaces, common models, common languages. A network, in short, where visible and expressive systems make contact. It was and still is a question of defining through practice and experience the forms of disobedience today, as a condition of action of the multitude. Exhibiting the archive, putting it at the disposal of various uses, signified leaving, each time, the display to people who consider the archive and the cultural mediation as their field of research.

EV *"Behind each utopia there is always a great taxonomic project", Perec said, obsessed by lists and classifications. In comparison with the chaotic neo-liberalist strategies and with the practices of resistance, what do you mean by disobedience? Is there still space for utopia in relation to the Archive's relationship with History and Memory?*

MS No, fortunately there is not. Utopia belongs to our happy or unhappy memory as Moderns. But, anyway, this is the past. Utopia always implies an "outside", a space in which one rethinks everything: the white canvas, the tabula rasa, the zero degree. For us, this "marvellous and smooth" space, as Foucault said, has been totally absorbed by the capitalist structure of our life. The interstitial space and the temporal "hic et nunc" are our alternatives to Utopia. As Virno told me some time ago: "it is not the ideal of the utopia unattainable in itself anymore: now we live in a time in which we face the absolute reality of the ideal, its tangibility". Saying no, disobeying or deserting, continuously confront with this.

EV *The Biennial institution often addresses to the international art circuit. How can one hope for "situated" artistic and curatorial practices that also explain and reveal the socio-political context they are passing through, without following existing models but creating new forms of curatorship? How can we answer these issues? How do the content of the work or the permanence of the artist offer new possibilities of imagination and/or action to local communities?*

VK I have never been interested in curating a biennial for the professional audience of a place that the exhibition is not located at. That's why the kind of biennial publications I get involved with do not work like visiting cards for my colleagues. We need more slow-biennials that allow artists to have a tangible base in the city they visit, more process than a fast turnover. I don't like superficial hit and run engagements, and have editorial roles as curators.

EV *What will be the repercussion on the cultural productions of global networks promoted by the Biennials in the specific field of forces where they are located?*

VK I really think that the Biennial institution is liberated today in the sense that the kind of pressure it faced in the 1990s in addressing locality in a very straightforward way of catapulting local talent to the wider possibilities and expectations is not needed any longer. The contemporary art world today is at one level rigorously networked. The general malaise in the field due to expectations of how the art world performs and occupies a strange place leaning towards a relatively new context of the leisure industry. It is not the same everywhere but the potentiality is already corrupting.

# TAIPEI BIENNIAL



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TEXT AND PHOTOS  
CAROLINE CORBETTA



# LA BIENNALE CURATA DA KORTUN E HSU SI DILUISCE IN VARI LUOGHI DELLA CITTÀ PER PRODURRE NUOVI PUNTI DI VISTA. MA È INEFFICACE RISPETTO ALLA TRAVOLGENTE REALTÀ DI TAIPEI

IN APERTURA E QUI ACCANTO: L'ATRIO DEL TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM CON L'INSTALLAZIONE DI INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA WE ARE ALL ERRORISTS, 2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DI BUENOS AIRES INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA). IN QUESTA PAGINA, IN BASSO: DETTAGLIO DELL'INSTALLAZIONE ROCKS AHEAD DI YOCHAI AVRAHAM, 2006-2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DI LUMINAL SPACES).

OPENING PAGE AND LEFT: THE FOYER OF THE TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM WITH THE INSTALLATION BY INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA WE ARE ALL ERRORISTS, 2008 (COURTESY OF BUENOS AIRES INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA). THIS PAGE BELOW: DETAIL OF THE INSTALLATION ROCKS AHEAD BY YOCHAI AVRAHAM, 2006-2008 (COURTESY OF LUMINAL SPACES).

L'immagine ufficiale della sesta biennale di Taipei è un fotomontaggio in bianco e nero che assembla le strade densamente edificate e trafficate della metropoli orientale: una selva di alti palazzi da cui spuntano alcune scatole bianche che altro non sono che le finestre aggettanti del Taipei Fine Arts Museum, la principale sede espositiva della manifestazione. Il messaggio è piuttosto chiaro: l'arte si propaga nella realtà urbana. Per dirla con le parole dei due curatori, Vasif Kortun da Istanbul e l'autocritico Manray Hsu, "la Biennale 2008 cerca di presidiare le aree pubbliche della città per aiutare uno scambio di punti di vista". E ancora: "Non ci sono ricette infallibili su come fare una mostra nella città e per la città". Intanto la loro proposta, seguendo una formula consueta, dal museo cittadino (che accoglie le opere di una trentina di soggetti tra artisti individuali e gruppi) si articola - ma sarebbe meglio dire: si diluisce - in vari luoghi della città. A ridosso del museo, nell'Art Park che lo circonda, è stato eretto il padiglione di Jun Yang che intende stimolare un dibattito sulla mancanza nella capitale taiwanese di un centro d'arte contemporanea. In una via cittadina la spagnola Lara Almaraz ha rimosso un muro eretto per nascondere il relitto di una delle vecchie case realtè della dominazione giapponese (1895-1945). Più consistente la rappresentativa alla Taipei Brewery, birrificio in piena attività dove sono state allestite le opere di Bert Theis, di Didier Fiuza Faustino e del gruppo Democracia. Un altro intervento solista, un video di Nevin

Aladag sulla mescolanza di culture pop di varie latitudini (presentato su monitor anche nel museo), si espande sulla facciata del grande centro commerciale Taipei Arena. Al momento del mio passaggio, l'arte aveva lasciato temporaneamente spazio a degli spot pubblicitari. Un 'contrattempo' che si inserisce brillantemente (forse più dell'opera stessa) nell'impianto teorico della biennale in quanto effetto esemplare della globalizzazione neoliberale capitalista - principale tema d'indagine di Kortun e Hsu. Ma è successo anche un altro episodio in cui la realtà ha interferito, svuotandola quasi di efficacia, con l'esperienza artistica: nel mio viaggio verso Taipei ho conosciuto una donna vietnamita che lavora presso una famiglia benestante di Kaohsiung, porto industriale del sud del Paese. Sono così venuta a conoscenza di un destino che accomuna molte persone del Sud-est asiatico che inseguono i propri sogni di benessere sulle nuove rotte della globalizzazione. Qualche giorno dopo, in un altro dei siti scelti dai curatori della biennale di Taipei, una stazione del Rapid Transit System (linea di treni veloci che collegano la capitale taiwanese al resto dell'isola), ho visto una serie di *lightbox* dell'artista malese Wong Hoy-Cheong dedicati alle donne filippine e indonesiane protagoniste di un flusso migratorio che le porta a lavorare come collaboratrici domestiche in nazioni con una forte crescita economica come Taiwan. Ovviamente, anche all'interno del Taipei Fine Arts Museum sono presenti lavori che portano alla ribalta nuovi fenomeni sociali, fatti di vicende individuali, come il video di Mario Rizzi che documenta la dolente vita taiwanese di due immigrate, una vietnamita e una indonesiana. Altri artisti non si accontentano di testimoniare

Pochi lavori non ricorrono all'impiego del video. Una ripetitività di medium che non ha però scoraggiato il pubblico

la realtà ma vogliono cercare di intervenire attraverso forme di azione sociale. È il caso di Burak Delier, che ha organizzato un movimento di protesta contro un'operazione di riqualificazione edilizia che minaccia l'insediamento di un'etnia indigena di Taipei. Non manca poi l'approccio agli attualissimi problemi ambientali: con il progetto *Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake again*, Mali Wu, cinquantenne artista locale, ricorda al pubblico che, a causa del surriscaldamento del pianeta, Taipei potrebbe tornare a essere ricoperta dall'acqua come era in un lontano passato e, parallelamente, cerca di individuare delle soluzioni attraverso una serie di workshop. Entrambi i progetti di "interventismo artistico", in attesa che la loro reale efficacia venga evidenziata, sono documentati all'interno del museo. Intanto, insieme, per esempio, alla colorata e rudimentale sala-giochi del collettivo danese Superflex o al murale mimetico del writer Bbrother, sono tra i pochi lavori in mostra che non ricorrono all'impiego del video. Questa ripetitività di medium non ha evidentemente scoraggiato il pubblico che non solo era senz'altro numeroso il giorno della mia visita (un normale, afoso sabato di fine settembre) ma sembrava oltretutto molto partecipe e divertito. In effetti la mostra ha nell'insieme un tono piuttosto leggero, *entertaining*, nonostante la 'gravità' dei temi affrontati, e risulta più convincente proprio quando, per mettere in scena la contemporaneità globalizzata, ricorre a interpretazioni cariche di humour - come l'esilarante famiglia turco-tedesca appassionata di *street dance* videoritratta dalla Aladag o le artiste Anetta Mona Chisa e Lucia Tkacova che, in una sorta di videodiario, passano in rassegna i politici più potenti del mondo giudicandoli secondo il loro grado di sex-appeal... - o a narrazioni visionarie, che operano quasi degli strappi nel tessuto omogeneo della mostra - come i due enigma-



tici video di Shaun Gladwell, che rappresenterà l'Australia alla prossima biennale veneziana, e le altrettanto arcane sculture robotico-fossili dell'israeliano Yochai Avrahami. Altri picchi nel disseminato percorso espositivo sono rappresentati da quelle proposte che colgono nuove possibilità nella globalizzazione come *Asian Pentagon* di Bert Theis, un'ospitale struttura fatta di canne di bambù assemblate secondo tecniche tradizionali locali in cui possono sedersi un centinaio di persone. Il padiglione di Theis è forse più di tutte l'opera "nella città e per la città" e non si capisce perché non sia stata valorizzata inserendola in un contesto realmente pubblico invece che nel cortile di una fabbrica.

Rimane la sensazione generale di assistere a una pallida rappresentazione di quello che succede per strada, nella vita reale. È come se l'arte, quando non opera nessuna rielaborazione espressiva ma si limita a documentare la realtà, o al contrario, tenta di risolvere emergenze sociali, esprima una disarmante inefficacia rispetto alla travolgente evidenza degli avvenimenti reali. Una debolezza che diventa irritante nella mostra "A world Where Many Worlds Fit", curata da Oliver Ressler e allestita sempre all'interno del Taipei Fine Arts Museum, dove celebrando i linguaggi e le forme di protesta dei disobbedienti no-global si propina l'estetica degli slogan buona per essere stampata sulle T-shirt di inconsapevoli adolescenti di mezzo mondo. **cc**



IN QUESTA PAGINA, IN ALTO: DETTAGLIO VIDEO DELL'INSTALLAZIONE DI IRWIN NISK PASSPORT OFFICE, 2007-2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DI GREGOR PODNAR GALLERY/GRITA INSAM GALLERY); FRAME DAL VIDEO DI MARIO RIZZI CHICKEN SOUP, 2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA). QUI A SINISTRA, DALL'ALTO: INSTALLAZIONE INTERATTIVA DI SUPERFLEX FREE BEER TAIWAN, 2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DEGLI ARTISTI); DETTAGLIO DELL'INSTALLAZIONE DI BURAK DELIER COUNTER ATTACK: THE INTERVENTION TEAM, 2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DI THE INTERVENTION TEAM/TAIPEI).

THIS PAGE, TOP: DETAIL OF THE VIDEO FOR THE INSTALLATION BY IRWIN NISK PASSPORT OFFICE, 2007-2008 (COURTESY OF GREGOR PODNAR GALLERY/GRITA INSAM GALLERY); FRAME FROM THE VIDEO BY MARIO RIZZI CHICKEN SOUP, 2008 (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST). LEFT, FROM TOP: INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION BY SUPERFLEX FREE BEER TAIWAN, 2008 (COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS); DETAIL FROM THE INSTALLATION BY BURAK DELIER COUNTER ATTACK: THE INTERVENTION TEAM, 2008 (COURTESY OF THE INTERVENTION TEAM/TAIPEI).

**THE BIENNIAL CURATED BY KORTUN AND HSU IS DILUTED AROUND VARIOUS PLACES IN THE CITY IN ORDER TO PRODUCE NEW VIEWPOINTS. BUT IT IS INEFFECTIVE WITH RESPECT TO THE OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE OF TAIPEI'S REAL LIFE**

The official image of the sixth Taipei Biennial is a black-and-white photomontage that assembles the densely built-up and trafficked streets of the oriental city. In this forest of tall buildings, a number of protruding white boxes mark out the projecting windows of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the event's main exhibition venue. The message is quite clear: art is propagated in urban reality. In the words of the two curators, Vasif Kortun of Istanbul and home-grown Manray Hsu, "The 2008 Biennial attempts to establish itself in the city's public zones both to help and generate an exchange of viewpoints."

Effectively, the exhibition's overall tone is somewhat light, indeed entertaining, despite the "seriousness" of the issues addressed. The result is more convincing when contemporary globalisation is portrayed using interpretations filled with humour

and they add, "There are no fail-safe recipes about how to make an exhibition in and for the city."

Their proposal follows a standard formula. Aside from the city museum (where one can see works by around 30 different individual artists and groups) the event is articulated – or perhaps diluted – around various places in the city. Next to the museum, in the Art Park that surrounds it, a pavilion by Jun Yang has been erected with the intention of stimulating debate on the lack of a centre for contemporary art in the capital of Taiwan. In a city street, Spanish artist Lara Almarcegui has removed a wall which had been built to hide the wreck of an old house that stands as a legacy of Japanese domination (1895-1945). A more substantial offering is on show at the Taipei Brewery, a fully operational brewery hosting work by Bert Theis, Didier Fiuza Faustino and the Democracia group. Another solo intervention, a video by Nevin Aladag on the mixing of pop culture from various latitudes (also presented on monitors in the museum), stretches across the facade of the large Taipei Arena shopping centre. When I walked through, the art had

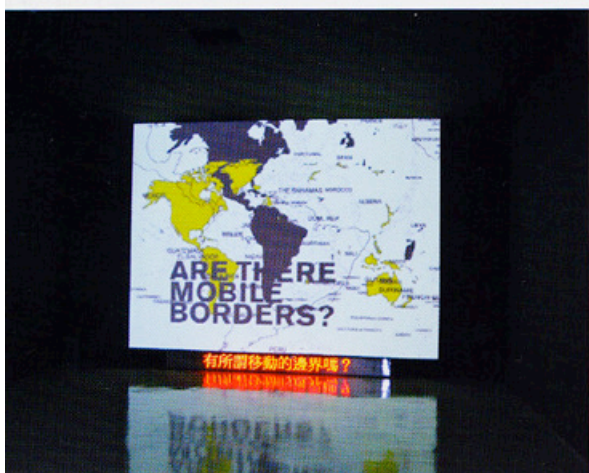




A SINISTRA, DALL'ALTO: BERT THEIS RIPRENDE UNA VISITATRICE CHE DORME SULLA SUA INSTALLAZIONE *ASIAN PENTAGON*, NEL CORTILE DELLA TAIPEI BREWERY (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA); INSTALLAZIONE DI NASAN TUR *BACKPACKS* NELL'ATRIO DEL TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM, 2006-2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA); VIDEO *BEAUTIFUL WORLD* DI MIEKE GERRITZEN ALL'INTERNO DEL TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM, 2006 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA); VISITATORI ALLE PRESE CON *OPUS INCERTUM*, LE STRUTTURE DI DIDIER FIUZA FAUSTINO ISPIRATE AL FAMOSO *LE SAUT DANS LE VIDE* (SALTO NEL VUOTO) DI YVES KLEIN, ALLA TAIPEI BREWERY, 2008 (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA). A DESTRA: UN BAMBINO INTERAGISCE CON L'INSTALLAZIONE DI MALI WU *TAIPEI TOMORROW AS A LAKE AGAIN*, SEMPRE AL TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM (PER GENTILE CONCESSIONE DELL'ARTISTA).



LEFT, FROM TOP: BERT THEIS FILMING A VISITOR SLEEPING ON HIS INSTALLATION *ASIAN PENTAGON*, IN THE COURTYARD OF THE TAIPEI BREWERY (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST); INSTALLATION BY NASAN TUR *BACKPACKS* IN THE FOYER OF THE TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM, 2006-2008 (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST); VIDEO *BEAUTIFUL WORLD* BY MIEKE GERRITZEN AT THE TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM, 2006 (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST); VISITORS BUSY WITH *OPUS INCERTUM*, THE STRUCTURES MADE BY DIDIER FIUZA FAUSTINO AND INSPIRED BY THE FAMOUS *LE SAUT DANS LE VIDE* (LEAP INTO THE VOID) BY YVES KLEIN, AT THE TAIPEI BREWERY, 2008 (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST); RIGHT: A CHILD INTERACTS WITH THE INSTALLATION BY MALI WU *TAIPEI TOMORROW AS A LAKE AGAIN*, ALSO AT THE TAIPEI FINE ARTS MUSEUM (COURTESY OF THE ARTIST).



momentarily given way to advertising. This "contretemps" provided a brilliant insert (perhaps more so than the piece itself) given the theoretical ideas behind the biennial, in as much as it offered an effective example of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation – Kortun and Hsu's chief theme.

But there was another episode in which reality interfered with the artistic experience, almost rendering it void of effectiveness. On my journey to Taipei I made the acquaintance of a Vietnamese woman who worked for a well-to-do family in Kaohsiung, an industrial port in the south of the country. It opened my eyes to the fate shared by many people in Southeast Asia who pursue their dreams of well-being in the wake of globalisation. A few days later I visited another site chosen by the Taipei Biennial's curators: a station of the Rapid Transit System (the fast rail network linking the Taiwanese capital with the rest of the island). I saw a series of lightboxes by Malayan artist Wong Hoy-Cheong, dedicated to the Philippine and Indonesian women who are the protagonists of a migratory flux that takes them to work as housekeepers in countries undergoing strong economic growth such as Taiwan. Of course, even inside the Taipei Fine Arts Museum there are works that bring to light new social phenomena, made of individual stories, such as the video by Mario Rizzi documenting the painful Taiwanese life of two immigrants, one Vietnamese, the other Indonesian.

Other artists are not content just to bear witness to reality, but seek to intervene through forms of social action. One such case is Burak Delier, who has organised a protest movement against a building redevelopment scheme that threatens an indigenous ethnic area in Taipei. But there is also interest in current environmental issues, with the project *Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake again* by Mali Wu. The 50-year-old local artist reminds visitors that due to global warming Taipei could be submerged in water as it was in the distant past and, in parallel, seeks to identify solutions through a series of workshops. Both these projects of "artistic interventionism", while awaiting their real effectiveness to be highlighted, are documented inside the museum. Apart from anything else, they are among the few exhibited works that do not resort to the use of video, along with the colourful and rudimentary games hall by the Danish collective Superflex or the camouflaged wall of the writer Bbrother.

The repeated use of video has evidently not discouraged the public. They were out in large numbers when I visited (a normal muggy Saturday in late September), and they also seemed very involved and entertained. Effectively, the exhibition's overall tone is somewhat light, indeed entertaining, despite the "seriousness" of the issues addressed. The result is more convincing when contemporary globalisation is portrayed using interpretations filled with humour. For example, an exhilarating Turkish-German family is enthused by street dance in a video portrait by Aladag, while in a kind of video diary the artists Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkacova show a parade of the world's most powerful politicians, judging them according to their degree of sex appeal. Equally compelling are the visionary narratives that operate almost in the gaps of the exhibition's homogeneous fabric, such as the two enigmatic videos by Shaun Gladwell (who is representing Australia at the next Venice Biennale) and the equally arcane robotic-fossil sculptures by Israeli artist Yochai Avrahami.

Other high points in the scattered exhibition route are represented by proposals that capture new possibilities in globalisation. For example, Bert Theis's *Asian Pentagon* is a hospitable building made of bamboo canes assembled using traditional local methods in which 100 people can sit. Theis's pavilion is perhaps more than anything a piece "in the city and for the city". Thus it is hard to understand why it has not been better exploited by placing it in a real public place rather than in the courtyard of a factory.

The feeling remains of a somewhat colourless representation of what happens on the streets, in real life. It is as if art, when it doesn't perform an expressive reworking but limits itself to documenting reality, or on the contrary, attempts to resolve social emergencies, displays a disarming ineffectiveness with respect to the overwhelming evidence of the real events. This weakness becomes irritating in the exhibition "A world Where Many Worlds Fit", curated by Oliver Ressler on show at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Here a celebration of languages and forms of protest exploited by no-global dissidents is administered through the aesthetics of nice slogans to be printed on T-shirts for oblivious adolescents around the world. cc

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27. September 2008, Neue Zürcher Zeitung

## Zornig und problembewusst

### *Expansiv – die Taipeh-Biennale für zeitgenössische Kunst*

Sabine B. Vogel

Lauter fahnen-schwingende Pappkameraden bevölkern die Eingangshalle des Taipei Fine Arts Museum, von der Decke hängen riesige Banner, und auf dem Boden liegen massenhaft mehrsprachige Manifest-Zettel, die für «errorism» plädieren. Es ist eine wilde Begrüssung, mit der uns hier eine der ältesten internationalen Biennalen Asiens empfängt. Als einer der ersten «Tigerstaaten», reich geworden mit den «Made in Taiwan»-Billigprodukten, gründete der Inselstaat bereits 1992 die Taipeh-Biennale. Jetzt, zur 7. Edition, weiten die beiden Kuratoren Manray Hsu (Taipeh/Berlin) und Vasif Kortun (Istanbul) die Ausstellung erstmals aus dem Museum in den Stadtraum hinaus – und dies nicht nur räumlich mit den Beiträgen in U-Bahn-Stationen und einer Brauerei, sondern auch inhaltlich. Denn nicht weniger als sämtliche Problemzonen des jungen Jahrtausends stehen hier zur Debatte: Migration, Globalisierung, Mikro-Nationen, Krieg und die Möglichkeiten, darauf und dagegen zu reagieren.

Künstler, politische Aktivisten und Künstler-Aktivisten mischen sich in Zustände ein, Internacional Errorista plädieren für die Macht der Fehler, Burak Delier setzt sich mit seiner «Counter Attack» für eine indigene Bevölkerungsgruppe ein, Oliver Ressler stellt eine Ausstellung rund um Anti-Globalisierungs-Strategien zusammen, und am Tisch der Künstlergruppe IRWIN können wir einen «NSK»-Pass beantragen. Welch unverhoffte Dienste dieses Dokument schon leisten konnte, davon erzählen Passinhaber in den grossen Videoprojektionen. Überhaupt ist Video das vorrangige Medium dieser enorm zornigen Biennale. Zwar können wir in den Installationen von Superflex Kartoffeln mit dem Hammer zermatschen, aber meist nehmen uns die Kuratoren in die Verantwortung. Wir hören die von Mario Rizzi dokumentierten, tragischen Geschichten von Immigranten in Taiwan, verfolgen Wei Lius Scheitern beim Versuch, mit chinesischen Studenten über das Tiananmen-Massaker zu sprechen, und werden von der glatten Ästhetik

der vier «Smash the Ghetto»-Videos der spanischen Künstlergruppe Democracia geblendet.

Genaugenommen allerdings geht es in Taipeh gar nicht um Kunst, jedenfalls nicht um eine Kunstmarkt-Kunst. Hier soll das Publikum aufgerüttelt werden. Während der Eröffnung postulierten die Kuratoren, dass die 150 000 Besucher aus dieser Biennale verändert herauskommen würden. Neue Tendenzen und globale Höhepunkte sind auf den mehr und mehr parallel stattfindenden Kunstmessen besser aufgehoben. Dagegen soll hier ein Problembewusstsein geschaffen werden – eine Aufgabe, für die Biennalen in ihrem Spagat zwischen internationalem Anspruch und lokaler Adressierung perfekt geeignet sind.

Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Bis 1. April 2009. Katalog NT-\$ 100.

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# Repräsentation der Kämpfe, Möglichkeiten des Handelns

## Die Biennale in Taipeh 2008

„Wir wollen Vorstellungen und Möglichkeiten zeigen, die Welt zu verändern“, sagt Manray Hsu. 47 KünstlerInnen und Künstlergruppen aus 26 Ländern haben die beiden Kuratoren Manray Hsu (Deutschland/Taiwan) und Vasif Kortun (Türkei) zur sechsten Taipei Biennial 2008 nach Taiwan eingeladen. Das Ergebnis ist eine spannende und hochaktuelle Ausstellung über den Zustand der Welt. Bis zum 4. Januar 2009 werden über 200.000 BesucherInnen – vorwiegend aus Taiwan selbst – im Taipei Fine Arts Museum erwartet.

Die diesjährige Biennale verschränkt das wechselseitige Verhältnis von Inhalten auf lokaler und internationaler Ebene, die alle mit der kapitalistischen Globalisierung in Zusammenhang stehen. Wie ein roter Faden ziehen sich Fragen der alltäglichen Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen und des Widerstands durch die Ausstellung: Das umfasst die Realität des permanenten Krieges genauso wie die Realität von illegaler Arbeit, Migration, Klimawandel und ökologischen Katastrophen, Reisefreiheit und Grenzregimen.

Den beiden Kuratoren ist es gelungen, mit ihrer Konzeption ein Klima der „Kontamination“ des Museums und der Konfrontation der BesucherInnen zu erzeugen: „Die Ausstellung erlaubt es niemandem, sich einfach abzugrenzen. Sogar wenn jemand die globalisierungskritischen Bewegungen mit etwas Berührungsanst und Distanziertheit betrachtet, kann die Person nicht so tun als würde sie der Sextourismus in ihrem eigenen Land nichts angehen – so balanciert es sich selbst aus. Wenn du dich mit einer Arbeit ernsthaft auseinandersetzt, musst du auch die anderen ernst nehmen – oder du lässt es eben ganz sein“, sagt Vasif Kortun, der bereits zweimal die Istanbul-Biennale kuratiert hat.

Auf der Schau in Taiwan werden politische Inhalte nicht selbstreferenziell als formale Attitüde benutzt, um sich auf dem Kunstmarkt zu positionieren. Die Taipei-Biennale ist radikal, intelligent, kreativ und humorvoll. Sie mischt sich ein, bezieht selbst Position. Die Arbeiten der Ausstellung kommentieren nicht von außen, sie machen ein Angebot: Sie laden ein, sich mit Möglichkeiten des Handelns und der eigenen Rolle in gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeiten und ihren Widersprüchen auseinanderzusetzen. So ist diese Biennale in der Form derzeit weder in China, noch in den westlichen Kunstmuseen vorstellbar, deren Ausstellungspraxis oft stark vom Ranking auf dem Kunstmarkt diktiert werden.

Diese Differenz wird besonders deutlich durch die Entscheidung der beiden Biennale-Kuratoren, den internationalen Kämpfen der „Bewegung der Bewegungen“ gegen die kapitalistische Globalisierung ein großes Forum in der Ausstellung zu geben – und damit zugleich den politischen Diskursen einen breiten Raum der (Selbst-)Repräsentation. Dafür haben

sie den österreichischen Künstler Oliver Ressler gebeten, einen Teil der Biennale zu kuratieren.

Unter dem Titel „A World where many worlds fit“ („Eine Welt, in die viele Welten passen“) hat Ressler zwölf KünstlerInnen eingeladen, die sich selbst als politische AktivistInnen verstehen bzw. sich den Bewegungen solidarisch verbunden fühlen. Ihre Arbeiten setzen sich mit den Erfahrungen der Protestbewegungen von Seattle über Genua bis Heiligendamm auseinander. „Das Projekt ist der Versuch eine globale Bewegung als Beispiel von kollektiver Intelligenz durch die Vielfalt künstlerischer Praktiken zu zeigen“, sagt Ressler.

### Radikal, intelligent, kreativ und humorvoll

Den Beginn dieses neuen internationalen Kampfszyklus dokumentiert der US-Künstler Allan Sekula in seiner Dia-Show „Waiting for teargas“ über die Proteste 1999 in Seattle. In dem Film „What would it mean to win?“ (vgl. ak 531) über die Mobilisierung gegen den G8-Gipfel in Heiligendamm 2007 untersuchen Oliver Ressler und die australische Künstlerin Zanny Begg, welche Strategien die Voraussetzung für eine Bewegung sind, die offensiv den Anspruch stellt, zu gewinnen.

In ihrer großformatigen Leuchtkasteninstallation mit dem Titel „history is a work in progress“ (2008) zeigt Petra Gerschner die Potenzialität der Erfahrungen und Möglichkeiten von Interventionen sozialer Bewegungen in gesellschaftliche Prozesse. Die Arbeit thematisiert die Entwicklung neuer Handlungsräume und die Erprobung emanzipatorischer Formen des kollektiven gesellschaftlichen Handelns am Beispiel der Proteste in Heiligendamm.

Zugleich stellt sie Fragen nach der visuellen Repräsentation der Bewegung der Bewegungen im kollektiven globalen Bewusstsein. „Join the Winning Side – Smash Capitalism“, ein Slogan, der als Lichtinstallation auf einem Lkw bei den Protesten auftauchte, formuliert den Anspruch einer globalen Bewegung, die herrschenden Verhältnisse nicht nur zu kommentieren, sondern sie auch aktiv zu verändern.

Die Installation „Whose World? Our World“ von Noel Douglas aus London reflektiert seine eigene Produktion von



Internacional Errorista, Argentinien: „We are all Errorists“, Installation, 2008 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Original in Farbe



Petra Gerschner, history is a work in progress, 2007/08, Lightbox, Original in Farbe

Plakaten, Buttons, T-Shirts, Büchern und Zeitungen für die Proteste gegen Kapitalismus und Krieg in den vergangenen Jahren. „Regime Change begins at home“ lautet der Schriftzug auf seinen Spielkarten, die er als politische Alternative zum offiziellen Kartenspiel, das die Truppen der US-Armee im Irak erhielten, produziert hat.

### Das Museum als Generator für Diskussionen

„Um Konzerne wie eure anzulocken, haben wir Berge eingerissen, Dschungel gerodet, Sümpfe zugeschüttet, Flussläufe verschoben und Städte umgesiedelt, alles um es für euch und eure Unternehmen einfacher zu machen, hier Geschäfte zu betreiben.“ Diese Sätze aus einem Manifest für ökologische Alternativen zur herrschenden Globalisierung hat die taiwanische Künstlerin Mali Wu in großen Lettern an die weiße Außenfassade des Taipei Fine Arts Museum geschrieben. Ihre Arbeit „Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake again“, die Installationen und Workshops mit UmweltschutzaktivistInnen umfasst, verbindet die Auseinandersetzung um Klimawandel mit Fragen des ökologischen

Städtebaus und der Lebensmittelproduktion in Taiwan.

Die DemonstrantInnen und AktivistInnen der Installation der argentinischen Künstler- und Aktivistengruppe „International Errorista“ haben das gesamte Eingangsfoyer des Museums besetzt: „We are all Errorists“ lautete bereits der erste Satz ihres Manifests von 2005, mit dem die Straßenaktionen gegen den Bush-Besuch und den „Global war on terror“ beantwortet wurde. „Die Entstehung von allumfassenden Sicherheitsmaßnahmen sind besonders nach 9/11 dazu benutzt worden, um Menschen zu terrorisieren“, betonen die Kuratoren Hsu und Kortun in ihrem programmatischen Text zur Biennale.

Wie gegenwärtig Geschichte auch dann ist, wenn die gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung unterdrückt wird und sich niemand über sie zu sprechen wagt, zeigt in beklemmend-eindrucksvoller Weise der Film „A Day to Remember“: Wenn die Peking Künstlerin Wei Liu am 4. Juni 2005 auf dem Tiananmen Platz die Frage stellt, „was für ein Tag ist heute?“ wird deutlich, dass alle es wissen, aber niemand bereit ist, darüber zu sprechen. Die Militarisierung des Alltags bis hinein in die Architektur der Trabantenstädte Seouls mit

ihren Bunkeranlagen visualisiert der süd koreanische Künstler Che Onejoon.

„Weil Kunst keine Antworten anbieten muss, hat sie die Kapazität, diese Inhalte von vielfältigen Perspektiven aus zu reflektieren, auf unterschiedliche Arten zu befragen und zu untersuchen, wenn sie auf individuelle Momente fokussiert. Dabei bleibt keine Geschichte einfach nur für sich stehen. Jeder Bereich der Betrachtung hängt mit vielen anderen Fragen zusammen. Zum Beispiel sind die Bewegungsmöglichkeiten von Touristen nicht vergleichbar mit der von zeitlich befristeten migrantischen Arbeitern oder einer ausländischen Braut – sie sind noch nicht einmal ähnlich“, sagen Hsu und Kortun. Deshalb haben sie das Museum in einen öffentlichen Raum umgestaltet, als „einer Generator für Diskussionen, in der Hoffnung, dass ein kämpferisches und kritisches Netzwerk sogar nach der Ausstellung gedacht und fortgesetzt werden kann“. Dieses Angebot an KünstlerInnen und BesucherInnen ist die Leistung der beiden Kuratoren.

Michael Backmund

Mehr Infos und Bilder unter [www.taipeibiennial.org](http://www.taipeibiennial.org)



Liu Wei, China: Filmstills aus A Day too Remember (Video), Originale in Farbe



# APT Insight

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# Taipei Biennial 2008

By Pamela Auchincloss

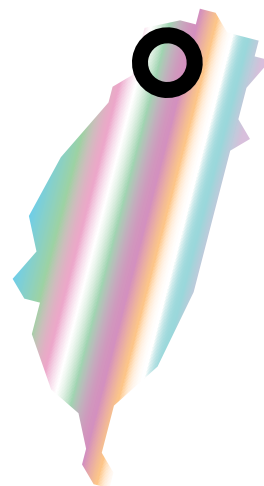
Seated outside the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, with only a tarpaulin roof structure separating guests from the growing ferocity of typhoon Sinaklu, the opening night of 2008 Taipei Biennial, curated by Vasif Kortun and Manray Hsu, got underway with Nevin Aladag's (APT Berlin) performance work *Raise the Roof*. From stage-left around eight girls each climbed onto an individual platform and proceeded to dance to music played from their own personal headphones without acknowledging their audience and in a world of their own. With only the noise of shuffling and stomping high-heels beating out different rhythms and on this occasion with the sound of heavy rain in the background, the performance allowed a moment for personal contemplation on individual action.

Taipei 08's main themes are all connected to the effects of neo-liberal capitalist globalization and includes works that suggest the potential for achievable forms of activism, self-organization and D.I.Y. intervention. Many included commissions have already put an idea into action and these include Lara Almarcegui's (APT Berlin) officially endorsed conservation of the empty terrain of an island in the Danshui river, as well as Superflex's (APT London) *Freebeer* project, in which they collaborated with a local brewery to produce a beer that has an open license for anyone to copy. Other artists offered the audience a chance to intervene in the public domain themselves, such as Nasan Tur (APT Berlin) with his work *Backpacks*. His individualized backpacks are available for anyone to borrow from the museum and each contains a different set of materials and props that can be used for a particular street action. They include backpacks with materials for forming a demonstration, making a public announcement, cooking on the side-walk etc.,

Also commissioned to produce work for the Biennale, Mario Rizzi (APT Dubai) focused on a local issue and produced *The Chicken Soup* a film that explores the experience of two foreign women who began their lives in Taiwan as bought brides. Other artists looked to their own contexts: Christodoulos Panayiotou's (APT Dubai) slide installation *Wonderland* presents a series of images found in the Municipal archives of Limassol that depict the strangely out-of-place, but globally orientated, annual Disney Carnival, and Yochai Avrahami (APT Dubai) focuses on two sites located between Jerusalem and Ramallah to present a no-man's land of abandoned potential, inhabited in his videos by his own animated creations.

With projects also taking place in other venues and open spaces within the city, the curator's ambitions were spread into the public arena. These ranged from another project by Almarcegui that required the official permission to remove a wall visually blocking an abandoned Japanese house to expose to the public's consciousness the state these houses have remained in since the post-war period and before coming planned renovation; to the more manageable invitation of Mali Wu's crop gardens that can be realised at the smallest scale on any spare piece of land, on a balcony or in a container anywhere in the urban fabric.

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# The Interscale

## Art After Neoliberalism

Brian Holmes



**You enter a typical white cube**, with four evenly spaced rectangles on the wall in front of you. One is an ordinary window looking at the world outside. Another is a video monitor with a recording of the view. The two remaining screens oscillate between bright colors – pink, blue, yellow – and scenes of a woman’s hands with polished red fingernails, deliberately cutting out pieces of some black plastic material. There is a soundtrack: ambient bustle, as though you were waiting for an office worker to pick up a dangling phone. Words appear on the screen: *So, I just want to know about uncertainty... and knowledge... and if everything can be calculated and known?* And now you begin hearing a voice, speaking about mathematical models and what insurance agents do for a living. “The less we know, the higher the risk. Risk always has a price, of course,” explains a specialist. The work, *Estimations* (2008) by Katya Sander, is a series of disembodied conversations with anonymous interlocutors, about the calculability of disaster and its uncertainties.<sup>1</sup>

Outside the window, a typhoon lashes the distant trees. The woman's hands assemble a black box with four rectangular windows: a scale model of the room you're in. Halfway around the world, on Wall Street, a financial maelstrom topples a huge investment bank, then threatens the insurance giant AIG. Its derivatives unit, located in the City of London, had specialized in credit-default swaps: sophisticated mathematical models assembled in the black box of a computer, to hedge against the risks of equally sophisticated mathematical models.

The Sixth Taipei Biennial, curated by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, was a show of political art from around the world, including a core group of directly activist works. The exhibition focused on “a constellation of related issues arising from neo-liberal capitalist globalization as seen in Taipei and internationally.” I arrived on September 12, amid the first gales of the typhoon. The following day all the public buildings in the city were closed for the storm, and the panel on the present situation of international biennials was canceled. The

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation of this work, and of all those successively mentioned, can be found along with complete information about the Sixth Taipei Biennial at <http://www.taipeibiennial.org>.

Internet was full of stories about Lehman Brothers, which collapsed that weekend, and AIG, which went into government receivership just a few days later. Our canceled panel was held that evening in the lobby of the hotel, with the artists and the curators, plenty of free-flowing drink and gusts of rain that kept blowing through the swinging glass door. “We came here for an exhibition about neoliberalism,” I said as an opener. “But that Utopia is over! Neoliberalism is dead. Now we have to wake up to the world of regions.” Controversy ensued until late in the night, a fantastic discussion in the eye of the storm. What I’d like to do here is to revisit that glimpse of the past and the future.

## **Gilded Era**

What exactly *was* neoliberalism? Projected on an entire wall, Mieke Gerritzen’s typographic film *Beautiful World* (2006) served as a manifesto for the Taipei Biennial. It’s a hilarious piece of graphic nihilism. One scene shows the continents merging into a compact mass, what the geographers call “Pangaea.” For the Dutch designer, neoliberalism is the Transcendent Blender that makes the world one. In another sequence the theme of *Jesus Christ, Superstar!* rings out against rows of famous faces, spinning around like fruits in a slot machine: King Tut, John Wayne, George Bush, Bin Laden, Hu Jintao, the Dalai Lama, Grace Jones, the Mona Lisa... It all lines up on Mickey in the end. Elsewhere in the film, a block of text displays these shifting statements: “Religion: In God We Trust / Politics: In Formation We Trust / Economics: Information We Trust.” But that last holy dogma has finally come into question.

Neoliberalism was a reformulation of classical economic liberalism after the Great Depression and World War II. The keywords were global currencies, free trade, direct foreign investment and financial markets. What it was *not* about was sovereign nations. In a brilliant study, David Westbrook shows how the architects of the Bretton-Woods accords in 1944, then of the European Economic Community in the 1950s, set out to establish a system of purely financial governance that would make the peoples of the world interdependent, thus rendering the national rivalries of the two world wars obsolete. It was supposed to be the end of history. The tools of the transformation were complex monetary treaties, deliberately impenetrable to all but specialists. The result, after thirty years of work in the shadows, would be a far-flung community of bankers, brokers, corporations, regulators and private investors, equipped with the latest communications devices and able to determine the outcome of world affairs by decisions that always made them money. Westbrook calls this transnational polity the “City of Gold.”<sup>2</sup>

The constitution of the City accelerated in the 1970s, when postwar investment barriers were broken down and floating exchange rates were introduced between major currencies. The deregulation affected America itself, though it remained at the center of the system. Around this time two significant things occurred. One was that Western bankers began to recycle excess capital – particularly petrodollars – into Third World loans for gigantic modernization projects that very often failed. The International Monetary Fund stepped in to impose its austerity plans, effectively taking over governments in exchange for more lending. Meanwhile in Latin America, dictatorships arose to destroy socialist development programs, in order to open the borders for capital investment from the USA. When the governance of the City emerged in broad daylight, it did not appear as a glittering

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2 David Westbrook, *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent* (Routledge, 2004).

tower on a hill, but instead as poverty from the barrel of a gun. Neoliberalism was first perceived as a nightmare.

After 1989, the City of Gold provoked some very different changes. The end of the Communist system opened borders, not just to money and goods but to vast flows of people. Free trade and foreign direct investment became the drivers of development, alleviating poverty for hundreds of millions. At the same time the Internet emerged, extending to the global middle classes the kind of communications that had formerly been reserved for denizens of the City. Travel costs dropped, migrant workers were hired everywhere, tourism became commonplace and millions of people began dreaming of a better life in a brand new world. The violence of the early years – which hadn't necessarily ceased – merged together with its dreamlike opposite, producing the postmodern paradoxes of Mieke Gerritzen's film. Neoliberalism had become a kind of Utopia. Its happy isles were the global cities. And this is where the biennials came in.

## Single Language

The perfect image of the global biennial was developed decades ago by the British group Archigram, in the comic-strip *Instant City* (1970).<sup>3</sup> A link is made between a sleepy Town Hall and the local IC headquarters. Together they call for a specially outfitted airborne zeppelin. Equipment and people pour out of the heavens, the central square becomes a theater, the sky becomes an open-air cinema. The event reaches its peak with the artistic and commercial saturation of the town. When the zeppelin leaves and the hubbub subsides, the town been turned into a permanent media spectacle and the InfoCenter sports an immense new antenna, connecting it to an urban network. Of course this same networking procedure applies to a football championship, a trade fair, an IMF summit or – as Archigram would have it – a rodeo.



The naked opportunism of urban promoters using art to put themselves on the world map has brought serious critique, accusing global biennials of cultural imperialism. In a memorable text, Elena Filipovic claimed that despite their mandate to represent a specific place, and despite their inherent differences from museums in terms of funding, organization and temporality, biennials have not created a new context for artistic practice in the processual

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3 The work, not included in the show, is reproduced in most retrospective catalogues of Archigram.

life of culturally specific urban environments, as the curator Carlos Basualdo had hoped. Instead, what they have done is to “show artworks in specially constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometries, white partitions, and windowless spaces of classical museum exhibitions.” In short, the globalization of the Western white cube.<sup>4</sup> This is the kind of frankly polemical critique that makes you immediately want to disagree. But first let’s translate it into the grammar of neoliberalism.

David Westbrook points out that across the world, the inhabitants of the City of Gold speak a single language, which is the language of money. Unlike Chinese, English or Swahili it has only a few words, one for each asset you can invest in. And unlike the vocabulary of a common tongue, these asset-words are in necessarily short supply: you can’t just freely exchange them with your neighbor. What’s more, the only thing these can words “say” is that they are fractions or multiples of each other. Yet their owner can exchange them for anything that a market can offer. Under the laws of the City, the language of money is of strictly private significance: it means nothing for society at large, but for the individual it means everything. Is there not some resemblance to the abstracted artwork, open to infinite interpretations within the neutral environment of the white cube? Has contemporary art not been the perfect vector of accession to the neoliberal economic system, precisely because of its undecidability of meaning and its freedom from traditional authority?

The condition of the work in the global biennial should also be seen from the viewpoint of the artist. It partakes of the scalar relationship between black box and white cube, as in *Estimations* by Katya Sander. This is a relation between the global and the local, or more precisely, between computerized abstraction and the intimacy of experience. The work commissioned by the biennial is projected from elsewhere, beamed down from worldwide circulation into the actual space of exhibition. The location is a black box for the artist, whose real conditions she must estimate: the only thing she knows is a set of measurements, an abstract model. This void must be filled with a calculus of possible meanings. As Westbrook points out, to ease their anxieties about the possibility of future earnings, investors require legal and institutional conditions as close as possible to their environments of origin. Thus, in art, the demand for the security of the white cube. But another scalar relationship continually threatens this contract, which is the collapse of the global into irremediable intimacy. What if the situation proves incalculable? What if the model breaks down? What if the risk of the real intrudes through an open window?

## Cracks in Pangaea

One way to understand the ambiguities of art in the global biennials is to consider an installation like *We Are All Errorists* (2008) by the Internacional Errorista. The work is composed of over three dozen standing figures made from photocopies of media images pasted onto hinged black backings and held up by thin wooden struts: you see artists, intellectuals, journalists, politicians and above all protestors, most of them with a flag or a word-balloon expressing a reflection, joke or slogan. There is much self-satire in this artistic representation of a demonstration in a museum: the original Spanish title, *Gente Armada*, refers not only to the arms that some figures carry, but also to their condition as fakes or set-ups. But the real question is this: would any visitor recognize these figures as references to

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4 Elena Filipovic, “The Global White Cube,” in Filipovic and Barbera Vanderlinden, eds., *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Roomade/MIT Press, 2005).

the Argentinian insurrection of December 19-20, 2001 – the first popular revolt against neoliberal globalization?

Of course, Taiwan also has its own political culture, marked in recent times by massive protests. On opening night the president had to offer a humorous remark about the need for revolt in a good exhibition – a touchy subject for an incoming leader who has already seen so many people in the streets. One could conclude that the image of protest, neutralized in a museum, is more comforting to politicians than the real thing. In an interview with Jacques Rancière, the artist Fulvia Carnevale suggests exactly that: “As soon as there are political subjects that disappear from the field of actual politics, that become obsolete through a number of historical processes, they are recuperated in iconic form in contemporary art.”<sup>5</sup> But one could also radicalize the interesting series of answers that Rancière gives to this line of questioning, by saying: These iconic images condense memories of historical experiences, which are latent in societies and can always suddenly spring back into reality, as living inspirations for new political forms. The question then becomes: how can such latencies travel over the cultural gaps Taiwan and

i m m e n s e  
separating  
Argentina?



The *Errorists* are self-consciously two-dimensional representations of the popular response to an immense crisis which closed all the banks and halted most economic activity in Argentina for a period of a year, in 2002. Similar crises have torn the fabric of daily life in countries scattered across the earth, with increasing frequency since the global implementation of neoliberal policies after 1989. The largest and most significant for the countries of Asia – but also for Russia, the former Eastern Europe and Brazil – came in 1997-98 in the form of a currency and stock-market crisis that devastated economies and led to a change of regime in Indonesia, with ongoing consequences of poverty and seething revolt. With each of these crises, the Utopian image of neoliberal globalization is shattered for millions of people, and elements of the historical past – the “nightmare” to which I referred earlier – filter back into waking awareness in the form of intense skepticism, anger and desire for another life. It is under these conditions that global biennials, particularly from 1998 onwards (but much

5 Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, “Art of the Possible,” interview with Jacques Rancière, in *Artforum* XLV, no. 7 (March 2007).

earlier in some places) became hybrid social vehicles, dominated by the standardized trappings of the world-class cultural event, but also traversed by artists, curators, critics and visitors seeking some other reality than the City of Gold. Each of these people – consciousness, sensibility and expression – embodies a break in the “one world network” of the transcontinental financial order. Cracks in Pangaea.

The particularity of the Sixth Taipei Biennial was to exemplify this ambiguous status of political desire within one of the showcase institutions of the neoliberal city. Consider, for example, a performance-based work on the borderline of activism such as *Backpacks* (2006-2008) by Nasan Tur. These are portable kits of materials for public speaking, demonstrating, cooking, sabotage and fan-worship, to be appropriated by interested people in each place of exhibition. We know that such works are primarily performance concepts, used at each site by artist-friends under relatively controlled conditions for the production of the videos that accompany the work. Yet these pieces also express a subversive youth and student culture, constructed around casual mobility within a far-flung support network and open to quick politicization, which has worried authorities since the 1960s. What is the message: neutralization in the museum, or the continuing spread of a culture of disobedience?

Consider *Welfare State / Smashing the Ghetto* (2006) by the group Democracia: a more spectacular and disturbing work of political art, which consists of a four-screen video projection showing the real destruction of a Roma settlement on the edge of Madrid by men in bulldozers backed up by the police, while cell-phone sporting yuppies stand applauding and cheering on bleachers built specially for the occasion. The piece can be read as the ultimate cynicism, since you, the spectator, are also invited to watch this event on specially built bleachers, where you can enjoy the thrill of other people’s pain and gaze with fascination each time the camera zooms in on a glitter-trash graffiti tag reading “Democracia.” What is the message: the social insignificance of the artistic signifier, or a forceful restatement of the critique of capitalist democracy by a philosopher like Alain Badiou?

Open questions like those above typically define the limits of acceptability for political art in public exhibitions. This is why it was a relief, in Taipei, to see a special section entitled “A World Where Many Worlds Fit,” curated by videomaker Oliver Ressler and including fourteen artist-activists who formed part, in one way or the other, of the counter-globalization movement. They were able to help create a very different kind of “Instant City”: carnivalesque protests and critical counter-summits at the sites of international meetings where global policy is set. The shared experience of engaged cultural producers gave rise to a museum presentation that did not pretend to be a “direct action kit,” but instead offered a wealth of insights, techniques, images, knowledge and reflection to any visitor involved in radical social activism, or simply curious to know how it’s done. There was an interesting atmosphere of self-questioning among this group – to which I belong, in reality – due to the feeling that our movement passed its peak a few years ago. Yet even as these doubts were expressed, events in the financial markets were vindicating every criticism that had ever been voiced in the chaos of the carnivalesque protests. Outside the museum door, the City of Gold seemed to be dissolving into its own empty equations.

## **Toward the World of Regions**

What happened in the weeks that followed the bankruptcy of Lehman and the bailout of AIG? The keyword is panic: a sudden retreat to private self-interest, when world-spanning

networks of confidence collapse to the scale of frightened individuals. Rather than global institutions with a robust rationality and an embodied sense of history, banks, insurance brokers and hedge-funds revealed their incapacity to admit basic realities, such as precarious workers who cannot pay their debts or housing markets that fall instead of rising. Apparently there were no words for such events in their impoverished vocabularies.

No one knows what the geopolitical consequences of this meltdown will be. But since the crisis was largely due to the overinvestment of Asian funds in corrupted American markets, the global claims of US-centered capital networks will undoubtedly decline, and humiliating retreats from both Iraq and Afghanistan could even trigger a new period of American isolationism. Chinese self-assertion and a stronger pattern of regional exchanges is likely to emerge in East Asia, following on the construction of the Eurozone and the more recent Latin American convergence (UNASUR). If the continents tended to merge together over the last thirty years, they may now start drifting apart again. The question in our circles is what will art – and “global biennials” – be able to achieve at the regional scale?

It was surprising to see such a small number of Asian artists at the Taipei Biennial (which in that respect was very much a “global” exhibition). Yet there was some striking work from the region, for example a series of lightbox photographs entitled *Maid in Malaysia* (2008) by Wong Hoy-Cheong, installed in a busy subway station. These staged images evoke a social phenomenon that is also common to Taiwan and Hong Kong, namely the massive presence of Filipino and Indonesian women as in-person servants, clean-up workers and “massage girls.” “For US\$200 a month,” reads the faux-advertisement introducing the series, “you will never have to worry about your family and home again.” The prejudices of Western and perhaps also Chinese viewers are overturned as dark-skinned, upper-class Malaysian children are shown in the company of fair-skinned Filipino maids, transformed into extravagant superheros! At last the artworks had left the white cube, to directly engage with the urban territory.



What was really missing in Taipei, however, was a self-organized group of Asian activist-artists to dialogue with the constellation of counter-globalists who had come together around the street demonstrations. The powerful social movements of Indonesia and Thailand were

invisible in the show, undoubtedly because the kinds of mediation between militancy and aesthetic practice that exist in Europe and Latin America have not yet been recognized in the corporate boomtowns of Asia. How can critical artistic production develop in a fragmented region, still deeply in thrall to Anglo-American models and now influenced by the trends of authoritarian Chinese society, with all its subtle and explicit prohibitions? Yet there is a potential here for entirely original activist art forms, as witnessed in the film *Promised Paradise* (2006) by Dutch-Indonesian director Leonard Retel Helmrich, which follows the shadow-puppeteer Agus Nur Amal as he interpellates startled passers-by with *dalang*-style chanted speech, asking them piercing questions about incidents of terrorist bombing in the archipelago.<sup>6</sup> These kinds of productions require serious cultural translation. But only when people have intensely local stakes to lay on the table can there be any real communication between the historical languages, which, unlike money and its mathematical derivatives, convey a typically human excess of meaning.

In addition to regional articulations, the question of transcontinental exchange outside current neoliberal frameworks could take on a whole new importance in the future. When one recalls that the Bretton-Woods construction was forged against the dangers of bellicose nationalism as it had emerged in the crisis years of the 1930s, the cultural responsibility implied by this prospect becomes clear. What is needed, if we are to be precise and also bold, is a keen artistic awareness of the multiplicity of scales: from the intimate to the global, by way of the urban, the national and the regional, each of which has its own codes and contradictions, yet all of which continually intertwine under current conditions. The multipolar world that seems likely to emerge is surely preferable to the neoliberal regime of continuous crisis, and to the collapse of abstract globalism into panic self-interest. But the retreat from the global order could also lead to dangerous intra- and inter-regional conflicts, as in the dark days of the mid-twentieth century. If transcontinental biennials have any *raison d'être* in the present, it may lie in a subtle apprenticeship of the interscale.

Inspiration comes from the Slovenian group Irwin. Years ago, their *East Art Map* pointed beyond the non-places of the City of Gold, by way of a large-scale, long-term participatory project that aims to reveal the artistic latencies of the phantom region of former Eastern Europe.<sup>7</sup> Irwin is part of the Neue Slowenische Kunst movement and is the founder of a transnational state, the *NSK State in Time*. The exhibition in Taipei provided an occasion to install an NSK passport office and to ask Taiwanese applicants what such a document could mean to them. Their responses and similar interviews were exhibited in a video archive about NSK state citizenship, with a particular focus on the tremendous boom in passport requests from Nigeria. Was it a simple misunderstanding, or an aspiration to a new state of transnationality in the twenty-first century? The activities of Irwin offer the example of an intimate circle of long-term friends, maintaining a territorial inscription in the city of Ljubljana while exploring national, regional and global destinies through the languages of art and the careful practice of cultural translation.

When the typhoon subsided, Manray Hsu and I went out to see the project by Lara Almarcegui, *Removing the Wall of a Ruined House. Qidong Street. Taipei 2008*. The single-

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6 The film was not included in the show and has not yet been distributed in English. It can be viewed with Dutch subtitles at <http://www.hollanddoc.nl/dossiers/34452838>.

7 Irwin, *EAST ART MAP: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (Afterall Books, 2006), as well as <http://www.eastartmap.org>.

story Japanese colonial dwelling, forgotten behind its moldering wall, had been exposed for a few days to the gaze of passing neighbors. By the time we arrived, it had collapsed into a chaotic jumble of stones and broken planks, utterly destroyed by the storm. The question that arises before such an historical ruin is this: Do you rebuild it as a monument to its own terminal decay – or imagine something better?



ARTE DESDE ASIA



# Es el turno de Asia

## Diez bienales y una feria obligan a mirar al continente

Todavía fresco el dulce recuerdo de los Juegos y con la vista puesta en la Exposición Universal de 2010, Shanghai toma el relevo de Beijing como capital cultural de China con la inauguración de su bienal, *Translocalmotion*, y su feria de arte, Shanghai Contemporary. Pero la ciudad no es el único frente abierto hoy en Asia. Otras nueve bienales han abierto sus puertas esta semana.

**J**ulian Heynen, director del K21 de Dusseldorf es, junto al holandés Henk Slager y el chino Zhang Qing, el comisario de esta Bienal y no oculta las dificultades a las que se han enfrentado para aportar una lectura propia sobre un tema que venía impuesto desde las más altas instancias oficiales. El término empleado, *Translocalmotion*, alude a la trepidante movilidad de un escenario como el de Shanghai, sujeto a transformaciones constantes. Pero esta movilidad no se ciñe estrictamente a los flujos migratorios,

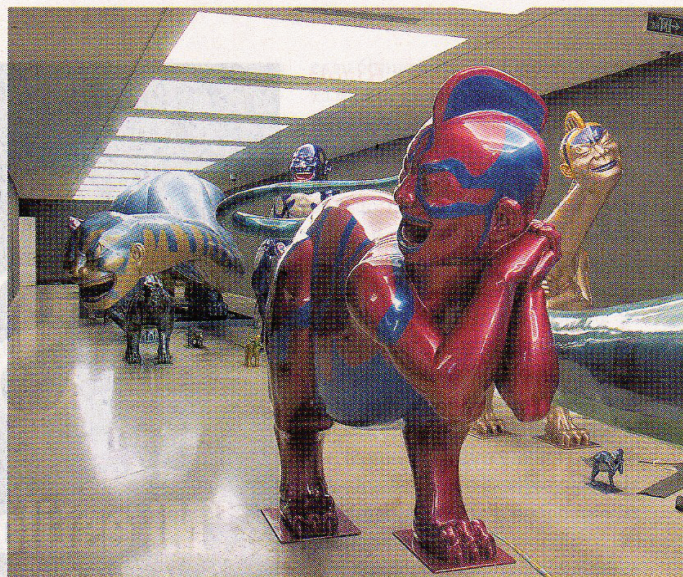
asunto tan manido en el arte de hoy, sino a desplazamientos de todo orden, ya sea de transeúntes, de salidas vacacionales o los que se dan en el espacio cotidiano. La exposición nace de la consideración de Renmin Square, la plaza principal de la ciudad y en la que se encuentra el museo, como zona de conflicto y eje de tránsito prioritario. Alzada sobre lo que fue un hipódromo construido en 1863 por los ingleses, hoy es un parque ajardinado jalonado por edificios institucionales como el Gran Teatro, el Museo del Urba-

nismo, el propio Museo de Arte y el Museo de Shanghai, que guarda muchas de las joyas de la milenaria tradición china. Es, por tanto, un lugar de encuentro de marcado acento cultural bajo el que se esconde, en un colosal centro comercial subterráneo, la versión más desbocada del capitalismo contemporáneo. La paradoja es asombrosa. En Renmin Square convive un matrimonio de conveniencia entre el régimen chino actual y el capitalismo, que es tan estable como insólito. Los dos mitigan los excesos del otro. Y es ésta la base sobre la que se alza la bienal formada por 60 artistas de los cuales la mitad son asiáticos, seleccionados por Zhang Qing, y la otra mitad occidentales.

La exposición se articula en torno a tres temas que pueden verse en los tres pisos del museo y en el exterior. Las intervenciones públicas han sido un acierto sólo relativo por la negativa de las autoridades a per-

mitir a los artistas trabajar en la plaza Renmin. En vez de eso, estos se han tenido que conformar con mostrar sus trabajos en el espacio circundante del museo. No sería un acierto relativo sino un verdadero dislate si la negativa de la autoridad no tuviera el enorme calado conceptual que tiene y que sigue arrojando luz sobre algunas de las limitaciones aún vigentes en las distintas formas de expresión, entre ellas por supuesto la artística. Así, uno de los mejores trabajos de la Bienal es el de la holandesa Jeanne Van Heeswijk, quien salió a la calle a preguntar a los vianantes por sus sueños e ilusiones para el futuro de su ciudad. Las transcripciones de esas ilusiones se han impreso sobre camisetas rojas que cuelgan del museo como si de un comercio se tratara.

La exposición está dominada por un ambiente de corrección absoluta, con un perfil documental muy marcado en muchos artistas chinos



y con un aire más poético y metafórico en los trabajos de los artistas occidentales. Más allá de tratar de fragmentar el espacio en tres secciones diferentes, creo que ésta es la división más llamativa. Es curioso comprobar las diferentes formas de aproximarse al tema en unos y en otros. Los chinos se ciñen al lema propuesto de una manera casi literal mientras que los occidentales lo hacen desde una posición más abstracta, con artistas —éste es uno de los fallos de la exposición— casi exclusivamente del entorno centro-europeo. Sólo hay un brasileño y una mexicana. Sorprende la ausencia de artistas franceses, ingleses, italianos o españoles (no, esto no sorprende) pero llama también la atención la ausencia de africanos pues algo tendrán que decir los artistas procedentes de urbes como El Cairo, Lagos o Kinshasha sobre movilidad y flujos urbanos.

Si la corrección es el tono de la Bienal, otra cosa es lo que destila la feria de arte Shanghai Contemporary, que es ya el referente del mercado asiático. Es un proyecto privado, y se nota. En esta segunda edición, la feria juega un papel importante entre el coleccionismo asiático pero tengo mis dudas sobre el

posible éxito de las galerías europeas (ocho españolas) y americanas, que vienen más bien a ver qué se cuece por estas latitudes. Muchas vienen a crear las primeras conexiones, quizá traten de intercambiar algún artista, y otras más ambiciosas se plantean abrir aquí un espacio, como ya empieza a ser habitual en muchas galerías occidentales. En los pasillos la estridencia era la

nota dominante, especialmente visible en algunas piezas del espacio dedicado a los proyectos, que es la verbena de todas las ferias.

Pero la atención artística no reside exclusivamente en Shanghai en este septiembre asiático. Busan, Taipei, Honk-Kong, Singapore, Gwangju o Seúl también han inaugurado sus bienales. La de Taipei es una de las más consolidadas, ahora en



**■ La Bienal de Shanghai está dominada por un ambiente de corrección absoluta, con un perfil documental y metafórico**

salas del Museo de Bellas Artes de Taiwán ofrece una densa perspectiva de los problemas de hoy. El cambio climático, la vorágine especuladora, el disparate de las políticas internacionales, la inmigración, el ocaso de la sociedades primitivas, los sistemas de producción o la conflictiva relación entre arte e institución son algunos de los asuntos que aquí se tratan —con coherencia, insisto, y

su sexta edición y este año ha sido organizada por el taiwanés Manray Hsu y el turco Vasif Kortun. Hay aquí un claro posicionamiento político que exige cierto esfuerzo al espectador, que no debe esperar grandes emociones. Pero no hay duda de que entre los planteamientos propuestos y el resultado final de la exposición hay una coherencia incuestionable. Un recorrido por las

OBRAS DE YUE MINJUN Y KLAUS METTING (DCHA.), AMBAS EN LA BIENAL DE SHANGHAI. DEBAJO, INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA, EN EL MUSEO DE TAIPEI

en profundidad— aunque hay algunos proyectos que se exceden en sus propuestas políticas, como la selección que ha realizado el alemán Oliver Ressler en un apartado de la exposición que, bajo el título *A world where many worlds fit*, resulta panfletaria y agotadora.

Hay interesantes proyectos que nacen de vivir el lugar y que ponen el acento sobre la realidad del contexto. Un alto porcentaje de los trabajos han sido producidos *ex profeso*, lo cual es uno de los aciertos de la exposición, que incluye tres proyectos españoles. Lara Almarcegui preservará una pequeña isla del río Danshui para evitar que caiga en garras especuladoras y también ha demolido el muro de entrada a una casa del centro de la ciudad; Democracia presenta su último vídeo, *Welfare State*, en un extraordinario espacio de una fábrica de cerveza, y, finalmente, Marcelo Expósito y Nuria Vila, que participan en la sección de Ressler.

JAVIER HONTORIA

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## Biennial takes fresh look at globalization through art



Visitors stroll through Internacional Errorista's art.

Publication Date : 10/16/2008

Section : Arts and Culture

By Amber Wu

In the lobby of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Argentina's Internacional Errorista has captured the spirit of the 2008 Taipei Biennial in its portrayal of a street protest. Cardboard cutouts of human figures stand amongst discarded protest flyers as rally banners hang

over their heads. The group's unique brand of installation art is not divorced from world affairs, but interweaves with social contexts and can be seen as a way to change the world.

Running Sept. 13 to Jan. 4, 2009, the 6th Taipei Biennial showcases the works of 47 artists from 26 countries who contemplate the cultural condition of neo-liberal capitalist globalization and the ambivalent relation between aesthetics and politics. The two chief curators, Vasif Kortun and Manray Hsu believe that while art does not provide answers for the chaos of today, it has the capacity to discover possibilities of change, to provide energy for thinking and also offer the chance to reflect on globalization.

Issues raised at the biennial include urban transformation in Taiwan, migrant labor, the emergence of micro-nations and ecological breakdown. As for the method, the event encourages participants to present new works and to create in Taiwan, so as to build relations within the local social context. The exhibition is a constellation of videos and installation art, and there are some activist art projects as well.

Italian artist Mario Rizzi presented a video titled "Chicken Soup," exposing the plight of two women from Indonesia and Vietnam who have Taiwanese husbands. Their experiences and the cultural obstacles confronting them while living in a patriarchal society are just the tip of the iceberg, with countless migrant workers experiencing similar situations in Taiwan and around the world.

Does globalization undermine the necessity of countries? Irwin, a group of artists from Slovenia, collaborated with the social group New Slovenian Art to initiate the project titled "NSK State in Time." According to the artists, the utopian "state" does not exist in the reality of three-dimensional space, and has no physical territory--it is only territory in the dimension of time. However, after several successful showings around the world, the NSK now boasts thousands of "citizens" and formal national symbols such as a flag, stamps and emblems. At the biennial, museumgoers can apply for a free NSK passport.

"Beyond the Wall,"--the project of Taiwanese graffiti artist-activist Chang Shuo-yin, aka Bbrother--mocks authority through his recreation of the grey walls usually found in military camps. The artist named himself after Big Brother, the omnipresent image of a man portrayed as the founder and leader of Oceania in George Orwell's "1984." Bbrother is also known for his participation in street protests and creating graffiti that expresses his political views.

Another Taiwanese artist participating in the biennial is Wu Ma-li. She states her concern for the environment through "Green Ark," which includes a vegetable garden she installed outside a window in the museum lobby. Calling on people to join her in experiencing the joy of growing vegetables and to participate in her workshop, Wu hopes that her project, "Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake Again," will inspire the public to pay more attention to the global food crisis, greening cities, and food's carbon mileage.

Spain's Lara Almarcegui also cast light upon the relationship between man and the environment. Her project, "An Empty Terrain in the Danshui River, Taipei," aims to preserve a small piece of land. Almarcegui has signed an agreement with the Taipei County government in which the administration promised not to develop the space for 10 years. A video of the island that introduces its plants, history and current situation is playing in the museum. Almarcegui also presents another project located in Taipei, which saw her tear down the boundary wall of a dilapidated Japanese style wooden house to expose it to passersby. Explaining her philosophy as an "anti-interventionalist's intervention," the artist stated that she wishes to remind the public of the forgotten corners in urban spaces.

To discover alternative ways to exist within the framework of today's capitalist economy, Danish group Superflex applies the concept of free software to its "products." The group collaborated with the state-owned Taiwan Tobacco and Liquor Corp. to produce "Free Beer Taiwan"--a brew that makes no secret of its recipe. The group explains its creative rationale by stating that artwork is not the property of its creators, and is only meaningful when used or improved by the viewer. Besides beer, Superflex also designed gaming machines that simulate the global financial system in the hope that people will begin to understand the power struggles taking place within it.

The 2008 Biennial is more ambitious than previous editions. For the first time, the exhibition has been extended to several locations in Taipei. For example, Malaysian artist Wong Hoy-cheong's digital photos are on display at the Zhongxiao Xinsheng Mass Rapid Transit Station, and Milan-based Bert Theis presents "Asian Pentagon," in the Taipei Brewery. Videos produced by Turkish-

German artist Nevin Aladag will be shown on the outdoor screen in the Taipei Arena.

In addition, this year's biennial has been transformed into more than just an exhibition. The museum collaborated with Dictionary of War--an online social activist community--to hold a conference in which artists reflect on alternative interpretations of war. Parallel programs include the "Urban Nomad" film festival and "Taipei Drift," an international workshop for art academics co-chaired by Taipei National University of Arts.

Such unique approaches to art and cultural edifices embody the spirit of the biennial. Given that the event no longer has "borders," the public has a greater opportunity to become more engaged with the arts in expanded social contexts. And despite technology minimizing the need for physical travel, artists hailing from geographically distant corners of the globe are able to come together and reflect on globalization while creating ways to make the planet a better place through art.

Write to Amber Wu at: [amber0207@mail.gio.gov.tw](mailto:amber0207@mail.gio.gov.tw)

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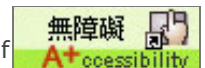
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## Modern art meets the party spirit

Taipei Biennial 2008 seeks to spread out across Taipei to meet the common man

By Catherine Thomas

Taiwan News, Staff Writer

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2008-09-12 01:10 AM

Two things piqued my interest in Taipei biennial 2008, the first was that this year's curators have invited Taipei's Urban Nomad to stage six weekends of free film screenings at the Taiwan beer factory. The next was talk of a commission given to an artist from Copenhagen to brew "Free Beer" as part of the exhibition.

For the uninitiated, which included me until people started talking about free stuff, Taipei Biennial is a nearly four month long exhibition of contemporary art. Coming up for its sixth innings under the biennial tag, it was a mere ten years ago that the festival moved towards widening it's scope by appointing international curators alongside Taiwanese. This year's inception has a broad theme of Neo-Liberal Capitalist Globalism which would seem to be a realization of the internationalization.

The exhibition is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, which serves as the main venue alongside projects to be held sprawled out over the city, in the Taiwan Beer Factory, Taipei Arena, Taipei Art Park and Zhongxiao Xinsheng MRT station. Not content with this, the organizers plan to use billboards to inch the project into various neighborhoods, just as globalisation shrinks the world this exhibition seems to wish to bring the same sense to the city - one where the effects of the exhibition are never too far from the ho-hum of daily life.

This year's curators, Manray Hsu (Germany/Taiwan) and Vasif Kortan (Turkey) have taken on no mean feat as they attempt to bring an exploration of a myriad themes under the umbrella theme including urban transformation in Taiwan, immigrant laborers, borders, micro states, war, and global unrest to mention just a couple. Hsu and Kortan have commissioned numerous new works, as well as asking artists to rethink previous work through the filter of Taipei Biennial.

Far from a compact afternoon's wander round MOCA, the exhibition will include performances, and the rather mysterious sounding 'interventions' around the capital. Spanish/ Dutch artist Lara Almarcegui plans to make long lasting changes to Taipei's cityscape. Through her interventions the artist will physically change the environment at no 13 Lane 53, Qidong St. She has also secured an agreement from Taipei City government not to develop on a river island for 10 years. Which is quite an achievement considering the speed with which new buildings appear across Taipei.

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Beyond the Wall by Bbrother

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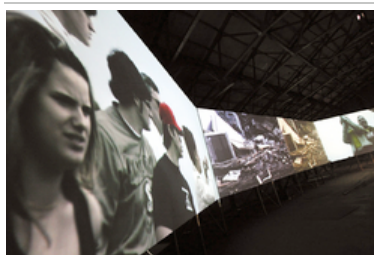
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Restaurant and Bar in Tainan Taiwan Beers

But back to "Free Beer". Somewhere along the way the curators commissioned Superflex from Copenhagen to create a beer, which has been brewed in Taiwan by the North Taiwan Brewing company (which, incidentally, brews a rather nice range of white beers) called rather misleadingly "Free Beer Taiwan". Before you get too excited the free stands for freedom. The beer is brewed from a recipe held with a creative commons license and the whole process is intended to question the system of IP and copyright.

In a further demonstration of the curator's ambition to reach out to the wider community with the project "Free Beer Taiwan" will be available in a few bars around the city, including Mei's Tea Bar on Yong Kang St (lane 43), Branches of Cafe Odeon (Shida and Gonguan), and Bravo Beer in Beitou (Daxing St). A 330ml bottle costs around NT\$170.

Keeping in the party spirit the opening party "Slurpee Revolt" is an afternoon of a good old fashioned free gigs at the Taiwan Brewery (Taiwan Beer Factory) from 3pm tomorrow. Bands on the line up include 88 Guava Seeds, Tizzy Bac and Go Chic. The space, a hanger adjacent to the Taipei Beer Factory Bar (which sells super cheap, super fresh Taiwan beer of all descriptions) provides both shade from the sun, should it deign to come out, and shelter from the rain, should it (as seems more likely) decide to bring on the proverbial cats and dogs.

With a bang-up-to-date theme, imaginative use of the city scape, six weekend's worth of free film screenings (see page 24) and let's face it, the fabulous idea of printing beer bottles with the immortal words "Free Beer Taiwan" one suspects that this year's Taipei Biennial is going to be a rather attention grabbing fun filled ride, albeit a thought provoking one. As the curator's statement states art may not hold all the answers, but its not a bad place to start off a dialogue about these issues which have become omnipresent across the globe.

Whether contemporary art is your bag or not, admit it, you're probably going to end up taking part in Taipei Biennial 2008 just by trying to get your grubby mitts on one of those rather cool bottles.

Taipei Biennial

Go to [www.taipeibiennial.com](http://www.taipeibiennial.com) for full program listings.

Entry into museum based exhibitions is NT\$30 for adults, NT\$15 for students

Taipei Fine Arts Museum

181 Zhongshan North Rd. Sec. 3, Taipei

Nearest MRT: Yuanshan


Slurpee Revolt <http://revolt.taipeibiennial.org/>

Taipei Brewery (Taiwan Beer Factory) No 85, Bade Rd, Section 2, Zhongshan district, Taipei

Nearest MRT: Zhongxiao Xinshe (exit 4)

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## Taipei Biennale Revisits Globalization



Lara Almarcegui, "An Empty Terrain in the Danshui River, Taipei" (2008)

Courtesy Taipei Biennial

By Susan Kendzulak

Published: September 26, 2008

PRINT | EMAIL



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Taipei Biennale Revisits Globalization

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Courtesy Taipei Biennial

Superflex's "FREE BEER TAIWAN" (2008)

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Photo by Susan Kendzulak

Internacional Errorista, "We are all Errorists" (2008)

## Your Views

Send a letter to the Editor

TAIPEI—One third of the world's biennials take place in Asia, and of these, Taipei's is one of the oldest. It began in 1992 by showing local painting and then, two years later, sculpture, but it was not until 1998 that it became an international event, when Tokyo-based independent curator **Fumio Nanjo** curated a show called "Site of Desire," which focused exclusively on artists from Taiwan, China, Korea, and Japan. Two years later, the biennial established a paradigm still used today: A committee from the **Taipei Fine Arts Museum**, the biennial's organizer, chooses a reputable Western curator, who then selects a Taiwanese curator. This year the committee selected Turkish curator **Vasif Kortun**, a veteran of international exhibitions in Istanbul, São Paulo, and elsewhere, and he chose the Taiwanese-born, Berlin- and Linz-based independent curator **Manray Hsu**.

The 2008 biennial sees several changes from previous editions. The start date was changed from November to September — the biennial opened September 13 and runs to January 4, 2009 — to allow it to coincide with the other Asian biennials that have banded together under the umbrella title Art Compass 2008. Also, for the first time, the biennial includes works installed off the museum's premises, at the **Taipei Art Park**, the Taiwan Beer Brewery, on a digital screen at Taipei Arena, in a Mass Rapid Transit station, and in an abandoned lot. In addition, several independently organized events are taking place concurrently, including a conference co-presented with the [Dictionary of War](#); the [Urban Nomad Film Fest](#), which provides free screenings of independent films with a focus on social activism in the region; and "[Taipei Drift](#): International Workshop for Art Academics 2008," a student/faculty workshop organized by the Taipei National University of the Arts and featuring participants from around the world.

What has not changed is the biennial's theme. As in 2004 and 2006, the organizing principle is the catchall idea of "globalization." According to the curator's statement: "The 2008 Biennial deals with a constellation of related issues arising from neo-liberal capitalist globalization as seen in Taipei and internationally, such as urban transformation, the dire circumstances of foreign labor forces, divided nations and micro-nations, permanent conditions of war, ecological collapse, global unrest, as well as opportunities for change. These issues are addressed through do-it-yourself practices, humorous approaches, and idiosyncrasies."

Of the 47 artists and collectives in the show, 32 are from Europe (including Turkey), eight from Asia, two from the U.S., one from Australia, one from South America, and two from the Middle East; 10 are female. Needless to say, the viewpoint is predominately male and European.

Upon entering the museum's lobby, viewers are greeted with cutout

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figures and paper strewn on the floor from the Argentine art-activist group **Internacional Errorista**. There is a mural spray-painted by anonymous Taiwanese graffiti artist **Bbrother**, and the Taiwanese artist **Wu Mali**, known for her work that empowers local communities, has planted vegetables on the museum's premises to highlight sustainability and green practices. But most of the works are videos, on view in dark screening areas with sofas.

Scottish artist **Roderick Buchanan**'s two-screen projection pits the pro-Irish Parkhead Republican Flute Band against the loyalist Black Skull Corps of Fife and Drum. **Wei Liu**, the only Chinese artist in the show, is showing a video of himself going to Tiananmen Square on the anniversary of the 1989 massacre and asking people what day it is; no one wants to answer on camera. Videos from the **Yes Men** show them pranking CNN and other institutions. **Mario Rizzi**'s riveting documentary filmed in Taiwan tells the stories of two women — one Vietnamese and one Indonesian — who endured terrible arranged marriages to Taiwanese men. The work is a testament to one of the negative effects of globalization in Asia: Many young women from Southeast Asia join matchmaking services to marry Taiwanese men as a way of escaping poverty; some of the matches turn out well, but others result in exploitation, indentured servitude, or prostitution.

The biennial curators also invited Vienna-based artist **Oliver Ressler** to curate an exhibition within an exhibition. His "A World Where Many Worlds Fit," which appears on the museum's second floor, contains works by 12 western artists and collectives documenting grassroots protests against the IMF and WTO in such cities as Genoa and Buenos Aires. **Christopher DeLaurenti**'s audio recordings compiled during the chaotic 1999 WTO protest in Seattle saturate the room, while videos, maps, light boxes, and agitprop banners, posters, and leaflets used by activists are exhibited as artworks. **Dmitry Vilensky**'s video *Protest Match – Kirov Stadium* (2006) shows the heavy-handed tactics used by Russian authorities to quell dissent at the G8 meeting at St. Petersburg in 2006, and Ressler and **Zanny Begg** provide a 40-foot-long timeline of the modern anti-globalization movement that began in 1999.

Among the highlights outside the museum are Malaysian **Wong Hoy Cheong**'s digital images of Indonesian and Filipino women installed in the Mass Rapid Transit station and Danish group **Superflex**'s "Free Beer" project (the beer, available for purchase at various Taipei venues, is free in that its recipe comes from a Creative Commons license [a nonrestrictive copyright]). Spanish artist **Lara Almarcegui** made two interventions in the city: One involved having a concrete wall that surrounded an old-style Japanese house torn down; for the other, she secured an agreement with the city government that it not develop a small river island for 10 years. The work's idealism is unfortunately undermined by naïveté and a lack of familiarity with the local culture. What she doesn't know is that in Taiwan, if the government wants to reclaim land, it will, as residents of Taipei's squatter/artist community [Treasure Hill know only too well](#).

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Taipei

6th Taipei Biennial  
13 September 2008 - 4 January 2009

## 6th Taipei Biennial 2008



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Curators

The 6th Taipei Biennial, organised by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, is curated by Manray Hsu (Germany/Taiwan) and Vasif Kortun (Turkey). It will take place between 13 September 2008 and 4 January 2009.

The Taipei Fine Arts Museum is the main venue established for the Taipei Biennials. This year, the event also includes projects in the Beer Brewery, on the mega-digital screen at the Taipei Arena, in Taipei Art Park, at the Zhongxiao Xinsheng MRT Station, and an intervention at No.13, Qidong Street. The Biennial will employ a number of advertising boards in the city as well, spreading the exhibition throughout different neighbourhoods and bringing the project into view when least expected.

In addition, upon the invitation of the curators, the artist/activist Oliver Ressler presents an exhibition within the context of the Biennial titled "A World Where Many Worlds Fit", that is dedicated to resistance movements.

The Taipei Biennial originates from a constellation of correlated themes all connected to neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. The threads of investigation in the exhibition include urban transformation in Taiwan, circumstances for immigrant and illegal labour, mobility, borders, divided states and micro-nations, permanent war condition, ecological breakdown, global unrest, and the opportunities for change. All these threads are processed and witnessed through do-it-yourself practices, individual stories, and humour. While art does not provide answers, it has the capacity to reflect on these issues from multiple angles, to work with different forms of enquiry and determine when to focus on individual moments. As with the approach of the Biennial, no story is infinitely singular. Each area of focus is associated with many other questions, for example, the mobility of a tourist, a temporary worker, or a foreign bride are certainly not the same, not even similar. Towards this end, the Biennial has been commissioning as many new works as possible, or asking the participating artists to rethink and adapt previous projects in light of their presentation in Taipei. There will also be existing works presented in juxtaposition to the new ones. The exhibition will include thematic compilations and farcical and biting videos.

There will be performative works and interventions in the city, some of which will be documented and reconfigured in the exhibition venues. The Beer Brewery, a site that has been through an extended process of transformation from its inauguration as Taiwan's first beer factory (a production and distribution site built during the Japanese

13 September 2008 -  
4 January 2009

Press preview:  
11 and 12 Sept. 2008

Opening  
ceremony & party:  
11 September 2008

Curators:  
[Manray Hsu](#)  
[Vasif Kortun](#)

Special section curated by  
Oliver Ressler

[List of artists](#)  
47 participants

Venues:  
Taipei Fine Arts Museum,  
Taipei Art Park, Taipei  
Brewery, Zhongxiao  
Xinsheng MRT Station,  
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occupation), to a state monopoly that involved the privatisation, re-branding and finally relocation to a site outside of the city centre. While the factory's history can be read as a classic example of shifting states of use in any post-industrialised city in the world, the exhibition is interested in seeking the nuances and specificities found within the general. The brewery's daily operation will continue during the exhibition run, and its space will be utilised as a real place rather than an insular exhibition zone.

Parallel programming includes a conference co-presented with the Dictionary of War that takes place on October 24 and 25, 2008; a film programme related to the themes of the exhibition co-hosted by the Urban Nomad Film Festival; and in collaboration with Taipei Drift, an International Workshop for Art Academics, 2008.

By means of these projects the curators and artists will explore the diverse opportunities that this Biennial is capable of creating and responding to.

(Press information provided by the organizers)

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# TAIPEI TIMES

Wed, Sep 10, 2008

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## Taipei Biennial set to begin

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**'FREE BEER':** Part of the art festival includes a beer made at the North Taiwan Brewery that addresses copyright issues and is sold at various venues in Taipei

By Mo Yan-Chih  
 STAFF REPORTER  
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The 2008 Taipei Biennial, one of the largest exhibitions of contemporary art in Taiwan, will run from Saturday through Jan. 4 at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and other locations in Taipei, with artists from 26 countries addressing themes concerning globalization in their artworks.

The public will be able to view a remote-controlled car dancing along to music on the large screen in front of Taipei Arena and find artwork, including a new brand of beer called "Free Beer Taiwan" produced by Danish artist group Superflex in cooperation with the North Taiwan Brewing Company.

The group will invite visitors to join their beer-brewing project — part of an international project that offers the recipe free of charge to anyone who wishes to produce "Free Beer" — and discuss the issue of intellectual property rights.

Besides the beers displayed in the museum, a total of 8,000 bottles of "Free Beer Taiwan" will also be sold in venues including Cafe Odeon, Mei's, Booday, Caffehands, Luguo Cafe and Bravo Beer, Taipei City's Cultural Affairs Department said.

One-third of the world's biennials take place in the Asia-Pacific region, and the Taipei Biennial is one of the more respected and prestigious as it is international in scope, the department said.

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Department commissioner Lee Yong-ping (李永萍) said the exhibition this year will not be limited to the museum. The public will be able to find art in public places in Taipei such as the Chien-Kuo Brewery, Zhongxiao Xinsheng MRT station and Taipei Artistic Park in Zhongshan District (中山).



A total of 47 artists will participate in this year's biennial.

Manray Hsu (徐文瑞) from Taiwan and Vasif Kortun from Turkey are joint curators for the exhibition, the department said.

This story has been viewed 627 times.

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## Three Turkish artists at Taipei Biennial

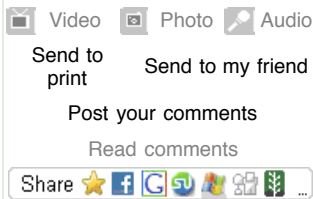
Contemporary works of art by three Turkish artists are currently on show at the Sixth Taipei Biennial in Taiwan. Organized by the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts, which is the main venue for the biennial, the event runs Sept. 13-Jan. 4, 2009.

Works by 47 artists from 26 countries are on display at the biennial, where Turkey's Burak Delier presents his installation titled "Counter Attack: The Intervention Team," at the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts. The museum also hosts Berlin-based Turkish artist Nasan Tur's mixed media "Backpacks." Photographs and video art by Turkish-German artist Nevin Aladağ are featured at the Taipei Arena.

Co-curated by Turkey's Vasif Kortun and Taipei-based art critic Manray Hsu, the concept of this year's biennial is made up of correlated themes all connected to resisting neo-liberal capitalist globalization. The themes explored through exhibitions in the biennial include urban transformation in Taiwan, circumstances for immigrant and illegal labor, mobility, borders, divided states and micro-nations, permanent war condition, ecological breakdown, global unrest and the opportunities for change.

The curators said the biennial has commissioned as many new works as possible or asked the participating artists to rethink and adapt previous projects in light of their presentation in Taipei. Side events include a conference co-presented with the Dictionary of War that takes place on Oct. 24 and 25, a film program related to the themes of the exhibition co-hosted by the Urban Nomad Film Festival, and an international workshop for art academics.

### Today's interactive toolbox



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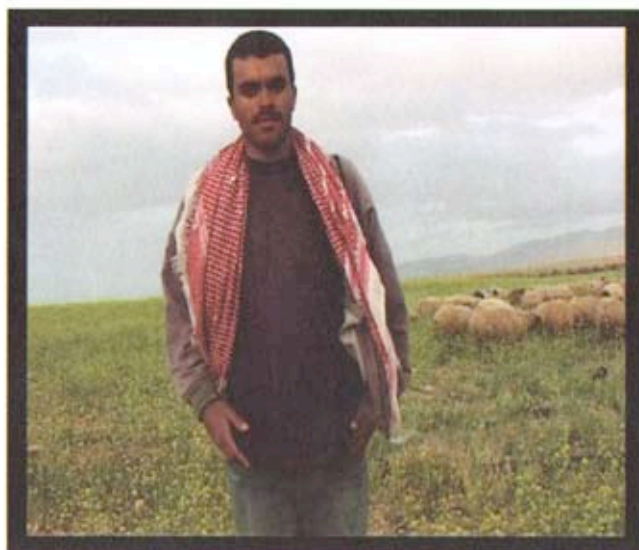
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REVIEWS

# TAIPEI BIENNIAL 2008

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ZIAD ANTAR  
Stills from *Tokyo Tonight*  
2008  
Courtesy of the artist

THE OPENING OF THE 2008 TAIPEI BIENNIAL COINCIDED WITH INTERNATIONAL BANK COLLAPSES, GLOBAL STOCK MARKET CRASHES, AND THE THREAT OF TYPHOON SINLAKU. SO WHEN CURATORS MANRAY HSU AND VASIF KORTUN DESCRIBED THE BIENNIAL AS A "COMMUNITY SITUATION" AND A "DEMOCRATIC PROCESS" EXPLORING NEOLIBERALISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER, THEY ARTICULATED SOME ASTONISHINGLY TIMELY CONCEPTS. THE INAUGURATION INSPIRED AN APPROPRIATELY COMMUNAL RESPONSE TO THE CURATORS' AMBITIONS.



Though the atmosphere could have been paranoid or pessimistic, the artworks spoke in optimistic terms, suggesting strategies of self-organization, DIY intervention, and anti-capitalist activism. And while the curatorial approach could have appeared fetishistic or naive, the exhibition worked, due in part to the fact that so many of the pieces—such as Lara Almaraz's successful procurement of a pledge to conserve an uninhabited island in Taipei's Danshui River; IRWIN's *Neue Slowenische State*, a state only in the territory of time, to which anyone can apply for citizenship and receive a passport; Superflex's ongoing *Free Beer* project, in which the beverage is accompanied by an open-source recipe and branding rights available for anyone to use—were already conceived to challenge opinions and models considered acceptable in the public domain. So while other large-scale, politically orientated exhibitions—Documenta 7, the 2007 Istanbul Biennial, and the 2007 Venice Biennale—have lately taken a classical documentary approach, Taipei 08 did not shirk the responsibility of literal intervention or the danger of appearing dewy-eyed in intent. It was motivated more by potential answers than by questions, and the works were not only more immediate but also actively involved in the issues at hand. They offered proposals of hope with attitude, irony, and even humor.

The exhibition was divided into three sections. The first part consisted primarily of commissioned works that referred specifically to local situations in Taipei. Among several references to migrant labor was Mario Rizzi's film *Chicken Soup*, part documentary, part enacted observation, which traced the lives of two foreign women who arrived in Taiwan as bought brides. The women's individual accounts were shocking; at the same time, they were narrated with unsettling acceptance. Between scenes, Rizzi flashed contradictory statements from the US



INTERNACIONAL ERRORISTA  
We Are All Errorists  
2008

Courtesy of Buenos Aires International Errorist.

State Department and Taiwanese dating agencies, pinning blame on authoritarian structures rather than on processes of individual disempowerment.

The second section proposed strategies of self-organization. Christodoulos Panayiotou's slide installation *Wonder Land* explored a Disney Carnival staged in Limassol, Cyprus. A slide projector showed photographs found in the municipal archives of Limassol that were taken at different renditions of this annual event. The carnival condition, which should be a cause for celebration and liberation, was treated by Panayiotou as a sign of global cultural hegemony displacing local postcolonial history. In Roderick Buchanan's *I Am Here*, footage of two marching bands from Glasgow, one republican and one loyalist, was shown on either side of a dividing wall (neither band would agree to participate if they were to be shown in a film together), and a pendulum edit ensured that their music never overlapped. By means of a similar dichotomy of space, Yochai Avrahami focused on two sites located between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Video filmed at the site and taken from satellite imagery was projected three hundred sixty degrees in a circular construction that resembled a well. The necessity of looking down on Avrahami's footage positioned the audience as both tourist and spy.

The third section bristled with humor, thanks to Ziad Antar's *Tokyo Tonight*, a video that playfully confused time, place, and extremely divergent economies. Shot in the arid landscape of northern Lebanon, the video showed a succession of farmers who approached the camera and simply stated the name "Tokyo." Their script bore no relation to their context or activity, so that "Tokyo" became a reference to something both instantly recognizable and at the same time unreachable, a metaphor for much more than the city itself. Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkacova's video of a provocative bedroom conversation, in which they rated various world

leaders, all of them male, purely in terms of sexual aplomb, teetered on hilarious satire but was at the same time overly populist in its tabloid-style use of advertising language.

During the biennial, Oliver Ressler invited curatorial responses to the anti-neoliberalism theme by way of a symposium held under the heading "A World Where Many Worlds Fit." Here, the momentum of inspiring propositions and exhibitions as democratic exercises flagged. The works presented were not diverse enough, and it was here that the biennial's dearth of artists and projects from Asia was severely apparent (during the symposium, there were none). The mainly documentary-based presentations of past actions also contributed to setting a tone like that of a members-only club. The one relevant question seemed to be: "Can such activist activity be disseminated by non-artistic practice?"

The differentiation, if there is one, between art and action, as well as the potential end of neoliberalism and the return to the local and the regional, fuelled a second, internal debate, which was entertained in a hotel lobby thanks to Sinlaku. The conversation also turned the notion of "democratic luxury"—a concept proposed by the late Hüseyin Alptekin that curators Manray and Kortun quoted in their opening gamut—inside out. Can the development of the biennial and its international criteria, which ultimately stems from the growth of a globally networked economy, now be read as a luxury taken too far? The opening days of Taipei 08 hosted a tight-knit group of artists who clearly experienced a democratic engagement with an exhibition. That, in and of itself, inspires hope that maybe art can change the world. The possibility to participate in the experience and to share in the communal dynamic was a luxury indeed.

November Paynter


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### A possible world: Taipei Biennale

**Lydia Ngai, Head Librarian**

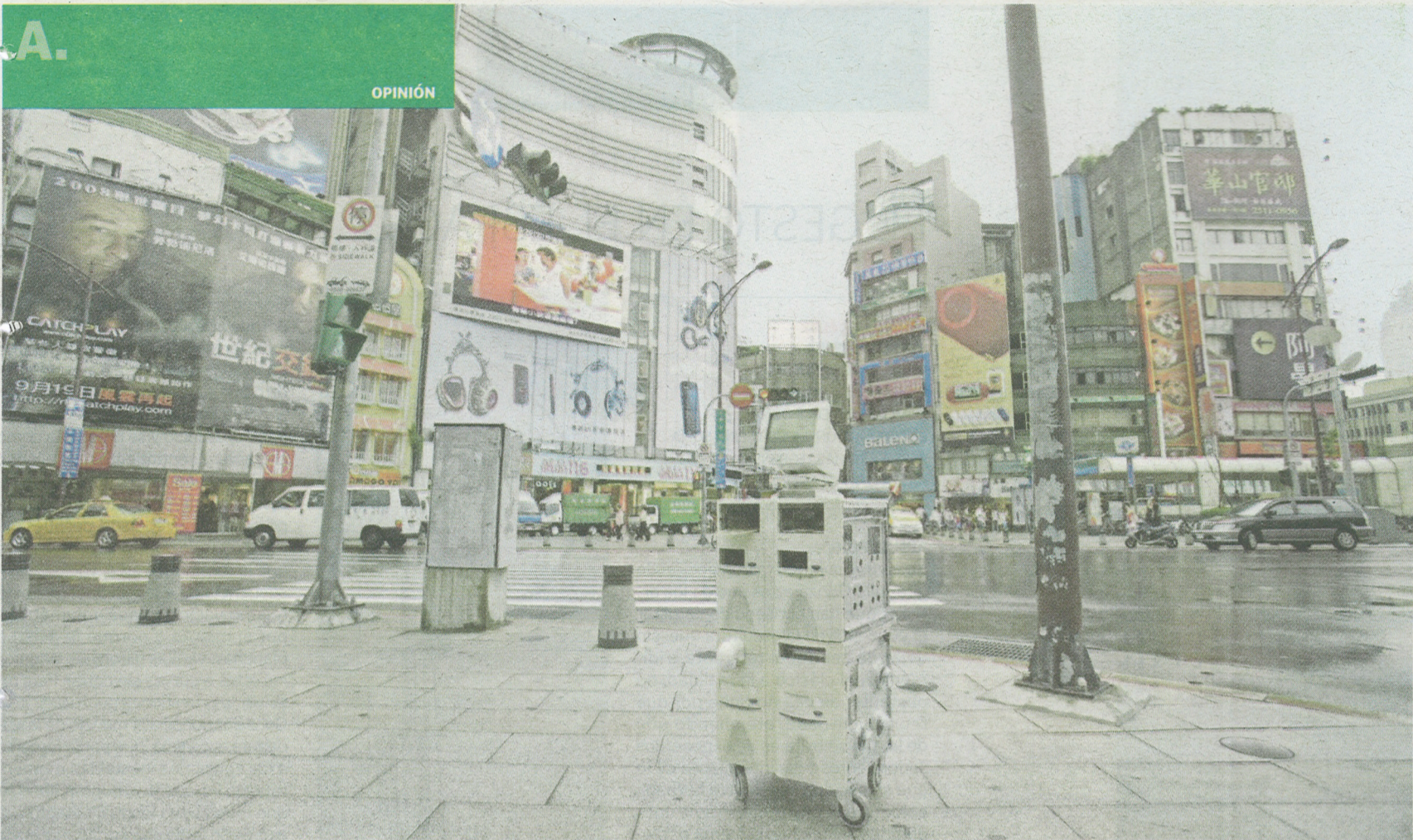
Venues: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei Art Park, Taipei Brewery, Zhongxiao Xinsheng MRT Station, PDP in MRT, Taipei Arena/Taipei Screen.

For the Taipei Biennale 2008, the curators, Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, have launched an inquiry into the 'neo-liberal Capitalist' globalized world that we are now living in. Despite the larger-than-life messages, the biennale is often playful because of witty choices of artists and artworks. Most works can be read as political statements tinted with various intensities of humour. The section 'A World Where Many Worlds Fit', curated by Oliver Ressler, brought 12 anarchist artists/groups into the venue and is an ambitious attempt to illustrated counter-globalization movements. It is amazing to see a group of cooperative anarchists orderly displaying their statements and records of their social actions in a museum!



The main venue of 08 Taipei Biennale, Taipei Fine Arts Museum.


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OPINIÓN

CRÓNICAS 2009

ÁLVARO RODRÍGUEZ FOMINAYA

## Sin lema, pero con ideas

SE ACABA DE CLAUSURAR LA ÚLTIMA EDICIÓN DE LA BIENAL DE TAIPEI, UNA CITA QUE, MODESTA EN PRESUPUESTOS Y EN NÚMERO DE PARTICIPANTES, HA ANTICIPADO NUMEROSAS RESPUESTAS QUE NO HAN SABIDO RESOLVER ENCUENTROS INTERNACIONALES DE MUCHO MAYOR CALADO

**S**orprendido aún porque todavía quedan comisarios con ideas –y además coherentes– en el circo del arte contemporáneo; quizás la Bienal de Taipei no sea la exposición que tenga mayor presupuesto o mejor selección de artistas, pero al menos es ejemplo de cómo construir un proyecto que aporte nuevos escenarios en el panorama del pensamiento visual. Siguiendo la línea en la que los comisarios se han puesto en huelga de escritura, en apenas una cuartilla, Vasif Kortum y Manray Hsu describían el desarrollo del marco conceptual que llevaron a la práctica: conexión con la ciudad, cuestiones derivadas de la política neoliberal, capitalismo y globalización, la catástrofe ecológica, situaciones de desigualdad y explotación... Una imagen no extremadamente optimista de la actualidad, pero que, en la narrativa del itinerario, lograron hacer próxima incorporando a un ritmo adecuado piezas que destilaban un intenso y sutil sentido del humor.

De esta forma, un tipo de arte claramente definido como «político», que suele ser extremadamente árido para el espectador, adquirió nuevos niveles de lectura al contextualizarse con las demás obras en la exposición. Todavía lo que llamamos arte político está excesivamente influido por las estrategias de la teoría del simulacro

### UNA LIMOSNITA EN METÁLICO.

EL «ROBOT MENDIGO», (2008), DE SAŠO SEDLACEK, ANIMÓ, DURANTE LOS DÍAS DE LA BIENAL, EL PASEO DE LOS TRANSEÚNTES

desarrollada por Baudrillard, y quizás necesiten de nuevas inyecciones teóricas en el siglo XXI. Es posible que la Bienal de Taipei haya mostrado lo que la anterior Documenta debería haber sido.

**EN RED.** La bienal transcurrió fundamentalmente en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Taipei, y se prolongó por otros entornos urbanos como el sistema de metro, la factoría Taiwan Beer o el parque que rodea al museo. El resultado fue una red en la que el Museo de Bellas Artes era el punto central e inicial del recorrido. Éste está ubicado en una construcción modernista de los años ochenta –un poco tarde para imitar a Le Corbusier– diseñada por Kao Er-pan, y es en sí misma una interesante construcción que nos remite a la arquitectura utópica de los sesenta. A la entrada del edificio, el inmenso recibidor fue «ocupado» por el grupo argentino Internacional Errorista, creado en 2005 tras una visita de Bush a ese país, y de forma un poco *naïf*, la instalación conseguía describir el tono que dominaba el resto de la exposición.

En la misma planta, Matei Bejeranu mostró un duro documental con el relato de unos polizones rumanos arrojados por la borda de un buque en alta mar, y, Mieke Gerritzen, la ani-

mación *Beautiful World*, en la que de forma hipnótica nos llevaba por un laberinto de mensajes empresariales, de estadísticas y consumo capitalista. Afortunadamente, Saso Sedlacek nos llevó al terreno de la levedad con su instalación *Robot Mendigo*, donde además de poder interactuar con una máquina tan divertida podíamos ver un vídeo en el que se nos explicaba cómo construir nuestro propio robot. Inquietante y valiente era el vídeo de Wei Liu, *Un Día Para Recordar*, en el que el artista radicado en Pekín entrevistaba el 4 de junio a los habitantes y estudiantes de la ciudad y les preguntaba si recordaban qué efeméride se conmemora en esa fecha. En él pone de manifiesto cómo la maquinaria política ha logrado borrar Tinanmen de la memoria colectiva.

La obra del libanés Ziad Antar, con tres vídeo-instalaciones, volvió

a actuar como un respiro dentro del generalizado e intenso tono de la Bienal, en especial, al estar situado a continuación de un espacio comisariado por Oliver Ressler, quien reunió a diez artistas y colectivos en una ácida zona crítica en la que destacaba el mural/esquema de Zanny Begg *Globalisation Timeline*, y donde estaba incluido un vídeo documental de Nuria Vila y Marcelo Expósito. Pero estos no fueron los únicos españoles presentes: en el Museo de Bellas Artes de Taipei se incluyó un proyecto de Lara Almarcegui, que continúa con su investigación artístico/social en torno a los espacios urbanos alejados de la mirada cotidiana.

### IMPAGABLE Y ESPECTACULAR.

También el colectivo Democracia mostró la vídeo-instalación *Welfare/Smashing The Ghetto*, con un montaje impecable y espectacular que ocupaba una nave industrial en la fábrica de cerveza Taipei Brewery. El fenómeno de encontrarnos tres colectivos o artistas españoles en una bienal en Asia es desgraciadamente una excepción que confirma la regla de la muy escasa presencia del arte contemporáneo de nuestro país por estas latitudes. Y eso que ya Bartomeu Marí fue comisario de esta Bienal hace unos años. Siempre nos quedará Taipei. ■

**EL FENÓMENO DE ENCONTRARNOS A TRES ARTISTAS O COLECTIVOS ESPAÑOLES EN UNA BIENAL ASIÁTICA ES DESGRACIADAMENTE UNA EXCEPCIÓN QUE CONFIRMA LA REGLA**

# FAREWELL? A Review of the Shanghai Biennale, Guangzhou Triennial and the Taipei Biennial

SOPHIE MCINTYRE

‘Farewell to Post-colonialism’. It is a bold and arguably attention-seeking statement and it serves as the title of the Third Guangzhou Triennial. In post-socialist China, where self and state censorship is still widely practised despite its burgeoning and seemingly free art market, the title gives us cause to pause and reflect. What is the meaning of such a claim in the context of China’s rapid transition? In this era of globalisation and cultural tourism, biennials and triennials have sprung up in metropolitan as well as in regional centres around the world to the extent that they have become institutions within themselves and are a regular calendar event. This year, the year of the ‘Asian biennial’, the small island of Taiwan alone plays host to four biennials, including one which is presented at a university art museum. What does the term ‘biennial’ or ‘triennial’ now mean and what purpose do they serve?

Shanghai is one of China’s largest international trading ports and commercial hubs; it hosts a vast array of trade fairs and is now preparing for the 2010 World Expo. As such it is an ideal venue for an international art fair. This year, two art fairs opened in conjunction with the Shanghai Biennale. Of these, the ShContemporary art fair which was promoted as ‘THE Asia-Pacific Art Fair’ and featured 150 galleries, including three Australian galleries, attracted significantly more international attention than the comparatively tame and lacklustre biennial. Is this a sign of the times or is it merely a reflection of China’s booming economy and commercial art market?

While international gallery dealers rubbed shoulders at these art fairs with the new affluent class of Chinese art collectors (of which most are investors and include Chinese artists), those who came to see the biennial and satellite exhibitions left feeling underwhelmed. Entitled *Translocalmotion*, the Shanghai Biennale focused on the theme of urban transformation, and for those who had seen the Shanghai Biennale’s *Urban Creation* in 2002 there was a sense of *déjà vu*.

This year, drawing on Shanghai’s People’s Square (Rénmín Guǎngchǎng) as a metaphor for urban change and mobility, the works selected for this exhibition bordered on the literal, and with a few exceptions, were uninspiring.



Maria Magdalena Compos-Pons and Neil Leonard, *Porcelana de China/My Mother Told Me I am Chinese*, 2008, multimedia installation. Image courtesy the artist and Guangzhou Triennial. All images in this article are photographed by Sophie McIntyre.

Within the museum, one floor was devoted to the history of the People’s Square, and a series of solo shows featuring works by three mid-career Chinese and non-Chinese artists. Of these, a large multi-media collaborative work by Lonnie Van Brummelen and Siebren De Haan was the most evocative and related to the exhibition’s theme which explored the socio-economic effects of mobility, transmigration, and globalisation. Indeed, this theme was a central point of reference in numerous works. The ‘floating population’ of migrant workers, and those affected by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam have become such popular topics of visual representation over the past decade that many of these works appeared repetitive.

In the Pudong district, the increasingly popular Zendai Art Museum presented a survey exhibition of works by the internationally acclaimed Chinese artist Song Dong. Within the museum’s large and high-ceilinged spaces, it appeared a relatively sparse display. This was surprising given Song Dong is a prolific artist whose practice spans more than two decades; and the exhibition included mostly earlier works, many of which have been seen widely in China and overseas. At the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), an exhibition entitled *Butterfly Dream* drew on an ancient Chinese tale to explore the themes of illusion and reality. The exhibition presented an eclectic and aesthetically



TOP: Liu Dahong, *Faith on a Horse*, 2008, mixed media installation. Image courtesy the artist and Guangzhou Triennial. CENTRE: Lu Jie, *No Foreigners Beyond this Point*, 2008, multimedia installation. Image courtesy the artist and Guangzhou Triennial. ABOVE: Maria Thereza Alves, *Wake in Guangzhou: The History of the Earth*, 2008, installation comprising photographs, text and drawings. Image courtesy the artist and Guangzhou Triennial.

challenging range of works by a wide range of contemporary Chinese artists. A subtle and thought provocative 'living installation', comprising a series of 'caged' bonsai plants created by Shen Shaomin, was the highlight of this exhibition.

In the Moganshan art district, which is Shanghai's equivalent to 798 in Beijing, numerous exhibitions, of varying quality, were held. One of the most memorable (though not for the right reasons), was an exhibition of a series of purposefully bad paintings to which were attached over-sized price tags. The laugh was clearly on us. Having been in Shanghai in the mid-'80s, when Chinese art was not

fashionable and when artists relied on the interest and/or goodwill of foreign expatriates to buy and promote their work, it is extraordinary to witness such a blatant and defiant act which struck at the heart of China's art industry.

As if anticipating growing critical dissent from those searching for more substance, the organisers of ShContemporary held a series of 'educational' seminars. Though not widely publicised, or easily heard due to the acoustics in Shanghai's historic Exhibition Hall, it was a worthy attempt by the organisers to, as their promotional flyer promised, 'guarantee in-depth research and strong artistic content'. In addition, a 'unique museum-style sales exhibition' curated by a team of international curators was held showcasing 'emerging talent' in the Asia-Pacific region (though the term 'emerging' was stretched somewhat to include a number of well established artists). Entitled *Best of Discovery*, it provided visitors with the opportunity to see new and innovative work and to meet the artist. For a brief moment it was possible to escape the commerce of art around which Shanghai's art events seemed to revolve.

Further south, the Guangzhou Triennial's *Farewell to Post-Colonialism* was by contrast an intellectually and visually engaging exhibition that was well researched and presented. While the title seemed to add little to the works selected, if one considers the *post* as 'a space-clearing gesture' – as Appiah proposes – the title offers a platform from which to view this exhibition.<sup>1</sup> In line with the curator's intention to explore new modes of thinking, the exhibition was divided into sections which included Thinking Room, Projects in Progress and Independent Projects, the latter of which was a series of discreet projects curated by an international team of research curators. Works were seamlessly incorporated into the exhibition and complimented the larger component of the exhibition entitled *Free Radicals*. The inclusion of these sections was an effective way of creating a space for experimentation and for the exploration of new ideas.

Upon entering the museum, Chinese artist Liu Dahong's tent, which was one of the Projects in Progress, set the tone for the exhibition. In the foyer the artist pitched a military-style tent, the interior of which was decorated like a church with fresco-like images depicting scenes from the Cultural Revolution. At the 'alter' a video, tracing the political history of China's Peoples' Congress, was projected from above into a bowl. The work's title, *Faith on a Horse*, refers to the Chinese saying *ma shang xin yang* (literally 'on horse faith'), and alludes to the ways in which religion, political ideology and violence inspire 'instant faith'.

With 181 artists participating in this year's triennial, there are too many works to comment on individually. However, there were several works in this exhibition which are particularly worthy of note. Within the Projects in Progress section, an installation by Lu Jie, the founder of the Long March Project, created a new multi-media installation entitled *No Foreigners Beyond this Point*. These words were stencilled onto a glass revolving door through which the viewer entered a room. Within the room Lu's video installation, which comprised a series of conference recordings and images from the Long March project, was situated alongside Xiao Xiong's metal sound wall that was entitled *The Internationale*. These two works explored, in an ironic, understated way, the complex relationship between identity and identification.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Wu Mali, *Edible Landscape Taipei*, 2008, mixed media installation, part of the larger installation *Taipei Tomorrow As A Lake Again*. Image courtesy the artists and the Taipei Biennial. TOP: Joseph DeLappe, *The Salt Satyagraha Online: Gandhi's March to Dandi in Second Life*, 2008, Second Life avatar, performance and multimedia installation. Image courtesy the artist and Guangzhou Triennial. ABOVE: Internacional Errorista, *We are all Errorists*, 2008, mixed media installation in the foyer of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Image courtesy the artists and the Taipei Biennial.

Artists Ye Wei-li and Wu Yu-hsin also examined notions of citizenship and place in their large photographic and video installation, albeit from a Taiwan perspective. In this work, which developed over a period of four years, the artists photographically record and comment upon the changes taking place at Treasure Hill, a historically significant site in Taipei where the 'renegade' Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party-KMT) soldiers and their families lived and which was recently marked for demolition. A new cinematic work by Chen Chieh-jen which investigates Taiwan's political and military history provides a thought-provoking counterpoint to the above work. A video by Cuban artist Carlos Garaicoa Manso also explores identity issues focusing on the Chinese community in Havana's Chinatown; and in an intriguing floor-based installation this artist considers the intersection between political ideology and urban architecture.

In the Thinking Room, a wall-based installation comprising photographs, text and drawings by artist Maria Thereza Alves was visually and conceptually well developed and was one of the highlights. Entitled *Wake in Guangzhou: The History of the Earth*, this work explored, within the context of Guangzhou's history of trading, the relationship between the transmigration of people and the cross-fertilization of seeds. From this grand narrative the artist developed a fictional historical account of Huagui Lu, a street in a former merchants' corner in Guangzhou; and the site from where the artist collected soil and placed it in a mound outside the museum.

Qiu Shiming also focused on the passage of time and the accumulation of waste in his evocative video entitled *Fragments of Autumn*. In another equally remarkable work, created by this artist in collaboration with Luo Haiming, a 'moving image' comprising text, photographs and video, explores notions of memory and place. Qiu Anxiong's striking installation, *New Book of Mountains and the Seas*, that was inspired by *The Book of Mountains and Seas* (Shan Hai Jing), combined video, painting, animation and documentation to explore, on a macro level, the relationship



## [ FRAMING CONFLICT ] Iraq and Afghanistan

LYNDELL BROWN AND CHARLES GREEN

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between reality and fantasy and how systems of knowledge are formed.

Fifty artists were brought together under the Free Radicals banner with, amongst a number of works deserving particular mention, an outstanding piece by internationally acclaimed artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba. Entitled *The Ground, the Root, the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree*, this work, on which Jun worked with art students in Laos, was truly memorable and poetically captured the drama and the flows and ebbs of life along the Mekong River.

Yi Zhou's series of 3D audiovisual animations were spectacular in their scale and execution, as the artist seamlessly blended ephemeral elements from real and virtual worlds to explore notions of time and space. Regrettably, the subtle musical compositions which accompanied Yi's works were overpowered by a Beatles soundtrack emanating from another work in the exhibition.

In his performance and multimedia installation Joseph DeLappe takes the idea of re-enactment to another level as he re-visits, via Second Life, Gandhi's historic Salt March to Dandi. Through his avatar, 'MGandhi', the artist amusingly re-enacts this famous 386 kilometre walk which Gandhi undertook as an act of non-violent resistance. Exhibited alongside this Internet-based virtual 'performance', DeLappe reproduced a towering cardboard model of this avatar which was built according to the same measurements as Michelangelo's *David*.

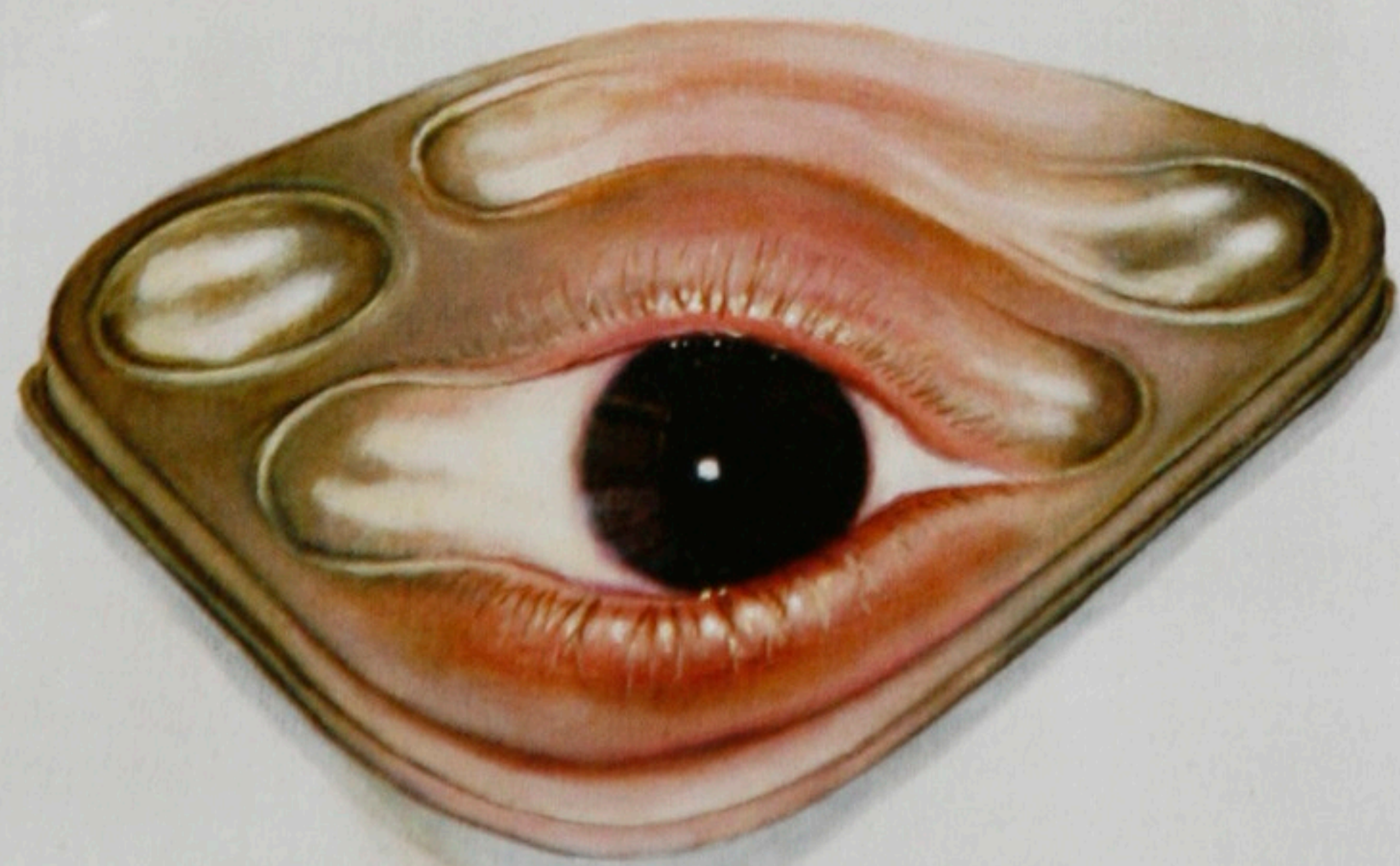
In *Noir Christie*, Conrad Botes creates a series of comic book-like characters and iconographic images in a large wall-based painting/installation to explore notions of power and race in the context of South Africa. Embedded within the overall narrative of the work is a series of subtexts relating to race, gender and religion, which are conflicting and are intended to subvert and challenge our perceptions and stereotypes.

In a personal meditation on history, race and identity, Maria Magdalena Compos-Pons and Neil Leonard created a multimedia installation which, like Carlos Garaicoa Manso's work, also focused on Chinese migration in Cuba that followed the end of the slave trade. Entitled *Porcelana de China/My Mother Told Me I am Chinese*, this work evocatively explored the impact of colonialism, migration and globalisation and how it shapes family histories and notions of identity. If there were any works in this exhibition that were endeavouring to bid farewell to post-colonialism, this was one of them.

The sixth Taipei Biennial was by comparison a smaller exhibition, with forty-seven artists selected, but it was no less ambitious and it featured a wide range of work, including numerous site-specific works. Entitled *A World Where Many*



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Julie Brooke A Trap for the Eye, 2008. Oil on board, 12 x 18cm

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*Worlds Fit*, the Biennial took as its central premise 'neo-liberal capitalist globalisation'. Under this large, rhetorical umbrella, there were meaningful dialogues and important issues explored in selected artists' works which loosely revolved around art and activism. In keeping with the 'counter-culture' theme, partition walls were constructed of raw or recycled materials which worked well in what could otherwise be seen as a conventional museum space.

The installation *We are all Errorists*, which occupied the foyer of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, was a fitting point at which to enter the exhibition. In response to Bush's 'Global War on Terror', the Argentinean collective Internacional Errorista employs irony and humour in their work and asserts that 'errorism' is the pathway to human liberation. This work, which comprised red banners, pamphlets, text and mannequins, was a witty counterpoint to the more sobering and often didactic work included in Oliver Ressler's curated exhibition which was part of this Biennial, and which focused on the counter-globalisation movement.

There were a number of large-scale installations and audiovisual projections which, by their very nature, demanded audience attention. These included Mieke Gerritzen's video *Beautiful World* which was apparently the Biennial's 'statement piece'; Taiwanese graffiti artist Bbrother's mural camouflage painting which appeared rather tame within the museum; and Yochai Avrahami's five-channel video installation which is viewed from a monumentally large wooden stadium.

Lene Berg's playful and intimate work, *Stalin by Picasso or Portrait of a Woman with a Moustache*, which comprised a video and a handmade book by the artist, was for me one of the highlights of this exhibition. In the narrative that runs through the work the artist re-tells the story about the controversy that developed during the Cold War when Picasso, on the occasion of Stalin's death, was commissioned by a French communist publication to create a portrait of Stalin. Though quirky, the work eloquently explores some of the real issues artists continue to face when political ideology and art converge.

Another highlight was Liu Wei's video entitled *A Day to Remember* which also examined the intersection between art and political ideology in China. On 4 July 2005, the artist, who is one of the survivors of the Tiananmen Square massacre, interviews people in Beijing asking them what day it is and what it signifies to them. The responses were of course varied, and ultimately self-censorship prevailed. By all accounts, this work could not be shown in China.

There were a number of site-specific, interactive works in this Biennial which explored issues relating to migration, urbanisation, and the environment. The artist group Irwin presented a series of video projections titled *NSK Passport Office* which questioned the concept of citizenship. The work was given extra poignancy when people in Taiwan were interviewed and asked why they wished to hold a passport to NSK, an officially unrecognised nation-state.<sup>1</sup>

Building on her body of community-based works, Wu Mali created a new installation entitled *Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake again* in which she explores the effects of climate change on the city of Taipei. In this socially engaged, interactive work, Wu encourages the audience to consider the effects of global warming on such things as food production; in her outdoor work *Edible Garden* she invites viewers to create their own self-sustaining gardens. Fortunately the gardens survived Taiwan's recent typhoons.

Climate change was also the subject of the Yes Men's entertaining video, *Halliburton Solves Global Warming*. In their usual subversive fashion, the Yes Men, posing as Halliburton representatives, infiltrated the Catastrophic Loss conference to introduce the 'SurvivalBall', an inflatable orb, which is designed to protect managers from sudden climate change. It was both hilarious and sobering to witness how these corporate executives so readily subscribed to this hoax and also envisioned this post-apocalyptic world, a world in which neo-liberalism, globalisation, art and activism, or indeed post-colonialism would have little consequence.

Notes

- 1. Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 17, Winter 1991, p. 63.
- 2. The symbolic NSK State was founded in 1992 by members of the Neue Slowenische Kunst movement from Slovenia, Europe. The movement itself began in 1984 as a large collective, representing artist groups/agencies such as Laibach, Irwin, Noordung, New Collectivism Studio and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy.

**Sophie McIntyre** is a curator and writer and is currently completing her Ph.D at ANU on contemporary art and identity issues in Taiwan.

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### The 6th Taipei Biennale

The 6th Taipei Biennale was co-directed by Manray Hsu and Basif Kortun. They were born in Taiwan and Turkey, but these Europe-based artists always have a great chemistry together. Among the 30 participating artists (teams), many were from East Europe, the Middle East and Asia, including Lebanon, Romania, Turkey, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Israel, Korea, and Taiwan. There were relatively few artists from the U.S. and China. Furthermore, no artist was from the 'nobility of art' such as Japan, France, and England. It is also unique that none of the so-called 'biennale artists' with artistically noble nationalities and backgrounds were selected.

If Gwangju implied post-colonialism without a theme, Taipei focused on various complicated phenomena confronting neo-liberalism. From the lobby, the exhibition began with a powerful 'terrorist action' exclaiming an 'international manifesto.' International Errorista, which was first organized in 2005 when George Bush visited Argentina, uses slogans, flyers, and flags of the terrorists to cleave the modern capital system and power structure. Taiwanese artist, B-brother, who creates graffiti that reminds us of Banksy, filled an entire wall with the military protective coloration. Also, Scottish artist Roderick Buchanan's *Here I am* showed the performance of a military bank in a rather humorous video. The repetition of artworks with military motifs seemed to indict the (public) power that exists in our capitalist lives in different forms. For this reason, it seems that the participation of Korean artist Won Joon Choi was inevitable. *The*

*Un finished\_Island* series of the large bunker that is still well-preserved beneath Yeouido Park in Seoul and the *Under-cooled* series of the disguised military facilities found in the mountains or new town development sites are like a clear montage of nationalism that is still solid in spite of capitalization and globalization. Nevertheless, we were able to see the destruction of nationalism here and there. The influx of massive capital, the emergence of multinational companies, and the settlement of illegal immigrants are some of the problems that cannot be prevented. Taiwanese artist Yu Cheng-ta gathered foreign

workers in Taipei, taught them how to read Taiwanese, and videotaped them while they were reading in Taiwanese. Irwin, a group of artists from Slovenia, proposed a project to issue passports of an unofficial nation called NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst). IAA of American artists printed graffiti on the floors using a small paint car called Robotic Objector and expressed the re-territorialization of globalization in a fun way.

Taiwan was much closer to Korea than I had thought. While feeling content by the fact I was able to visit the biennale and all other major local art venues, including VT Salon, IT Park, MOCA, and Artist Village, without getting lost, I suddenly thought, "Would it be possible to visit all major art venues in Seoul?" No way. As many Taiwanese art specialists and artists, whom I met along the way, complained, Taiwan lacks contemporary art venues. At the Taipei Biennale, Yang Jun submitted a proposal to build a contemporary art center in Taipei instead of submitting an artwork. I think I can understand why he did.

Kyoung-yun Ho



Left: Didier Fiuza Faustino, *Opus Incertum*, 2008, mixed Media; Right: Yochai AVRAHAMI, *Rocks Ahead*, 2006-08 5 channels video installation, 450 x 675cm © liminal spaces; Below: Internacional Errorista, *We are all Errorists*, 2008 mixed media, © Buenos Aires Internacional Errorista.

Opposite Left: James Turrel, *The weight*, 2006, mixed media © James Turrel Photo by Florian Holzherr; Right: James Turrel, *Jadito, Red*, 1968, mixed media, 2006 © James Turrel Photo by Florian Holzherr.

# TAIPEI BIENNIAL

SEPT 13 - JAN 4

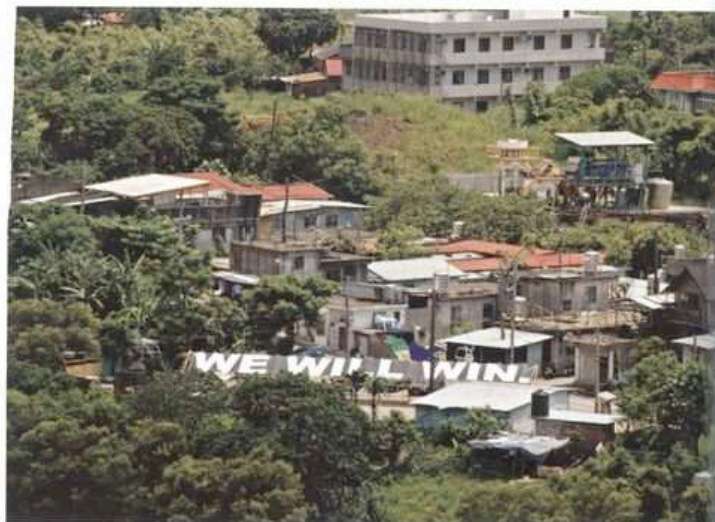
BY BARBARA POLLACK

Biennials as platforms for political agendas have become something of a cliché, particularly since Okwui Enwezor topped them all with Documenta 11 in 2002. In that show, issues of globalization, migration and post-colonialism were conveyed through so many documentary-style narrative videos that visitors would have had to spend a month in Kassel to view them all. Learning something, but not quite enough, from that experience, the two artistic organizers of the 2008 Taipei Biennial—Vasif Kortun, director of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center in Istanbul, and Manray Hsu, an independent curator based in Berlin and Taipei—trimmed their video program down to four hours.

But they still managed to cram 35 single-channel or multiscreen works into an exhibition that features only 47 artists. Most of these works are housed in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, with a handful of other site-specific installations throughout the city. This is a well-curated show, in contrast to some other, more freewheeling productions that took place in Asia this fall, but one in which the esthetics of political art is narrowly construed as either “problem-pointing” or “problem-solving”—so much so that it is tedious to

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IS AN ARTIST AND  
FREELANCE WRITER  
WHO LIVES IN  
NEW YORK.

BURAK DELIER:  
COUNTER ATTACK:  
THE INTERVENTION  
TEAM, 2008, PHOTO  
FROM INSTALLATION  
DOCUMENTING  
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TAIPEI BIENNIAL.



tour the exhibition with the hope of comprehending more than a few of the research-laden projects on view.

Even though the biennial does not have an official title, it does have a clear-cut premise: an investigation of “neo-liberal capitalist globalization.” This knee-jerk rhetoric is intended to convey that the finger-pointing is directed at Western powers that espouse democracy but practice something entirely different in the global economic realm. When asked if this should be known as the “anti-globalization biennial,” Kortun answered, “Yes,” without a shred of irony, and also without acknowledging that international curators like him—and the artists he promotes—are in fact beneficiaries of the globalization of the art world.

This straightforward approach is fine for a political science class, but a more complex relationship to esthetics may be necessary to create an interesting art exhibition. Globalization is quite a relevant topic in Taiwan, a country that has outsourced much of its manufacturing base to China. There are Taiwanese artists, such as Chen Chieh-Jen (not in the show), who have dealt with the consequences of this economic shift to ravishing, even elegiac effect [see *A.i.A.*, Jan. '08]. But here the documentary practices resulted in a lot of screens filled with talking heads and endless subtitles.

The centerpiece of the biennial is a single-gallery section titled “A World Where Many Worlds Fit.” This mini-exhibition, curated by Oliver Ressler, a Viennese artist who has organized shows and projects on global economics and the politics of

resistance, documents widespread anti-globalization protests that have taken place since the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico. This seems the most vital part of the biennial, since its subjects—unabashed youthful protesters—deal directly with politics by putting their lives on the line. Twelve artists are included in this section, many of them anti-globalization activists. Noel Douglas (Britain) has designed T-shirts, posters and stickers used at anti-capitalist rallies, and Gregory Sholette (U.S.) contributed a miniature WTO protester action figure. Several videos documented protests at various locations, among them a collaboration between Ressler and Zanny Begg (Australia) titled *Jumps and Surprises: What Would It Mean to Win* (2008), shot on the barricades at the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, in June 2007. It provides, more than anything else, a picture of the activists as inventive in their anarchic tactics. Far more moving, however, is American Allan Sekula's much-exhibited slide projection *Waiting for Tear Gas*, compiled from images taken outside the 1999 WTO conference in Seattle. He captures the strange confluence of characters—police in riot gear, activists with little to protect them, businessmen shunning the camera—on the streets of the city just before violence erupts.

Beyond Ressler's contribution, there were many works dealing with the impact of globalization, starting with projects that were uncomfortably close to home for Taiwanese visitors to the exhibition. Romanian artist Matei Bejenaru's video *Maersk Dubai*

(2006-08) traces the tragic tale of two Romanian stowaways who died at sea when they were cast overboard by a Taiwanese captain in 1996, and Turkish artist Burak Delier documents his *Counter Attack* project, in which he organized the Shijou tribe, part of Taiwan's largest group of indigenous people, to protest plans to dismantle their housing on the banks of the Sindian River. Taiwanese artist Cheng-Ta Yu exhibited nine videos, each individually framed on its own small flat screen, looking like modest August Sander photographs, under the rubric *The Ventriloquists* (2008). In each segment, a new immigrant to Taiwan is asked to repeat mindless phrases in Chinese, often failing to catch the correct pronunciation. *Beggar Robot* (2008), created by Slovenian artist Sašo Sedlacek, is a low-tech machine that puts out a hand and asks for money but is far more charming and

cute than your average homeless beggar. It is accompanied by a video demonstrating the machine's effectiveness and popularity as it receives a stream of coins from children in a Taipei shopping mall.

But the more engaging works in the exhibition depart from the "problem art" format and use this opportunity to examine the esthetics of various forms of political activism. The lobby of the art museum is overrun with black-and-white cardboard figures that look like badly Xeroxed reproductions from newsprint, holding red flags and signs promoting social anarchy—"We are all Errorists." This surrealistic slogan was created by a band of Argentine artists called Internacional Errorista, who originally united to protest George W. Bush's visit to the Summit of the Americas in 2005. Nearby, *Beautiful World* (2006), a jazzy video by Dutch graphic designer Mieke Gerritzen, turns logos and slogans from the corporate world into entertaining graphic patterns set to pop tunes.

Humor briefly appears in two videos by the Yes Men, U.S. activists whose work has infiltrated mainstream media by seamlessly imitating corporate press releases. In *Dow Does the Right Thing* (2006), they managed to get on BBC World in 2004 posing as representatives from Dow Chemical, apologizing for the Bhopal chemical disaster and promising to liquidate Union Carbide to pay for their mistake. (The interview is as funny as a Monty Python

routine but was taken seriously by major news networks. When Dow issued a denial, the artists garnered even more coverage.) The three Danish artists who work under the name Superflex created a carnivalesque room offering free beer and eight game tables, each equipped with a chute and a mallet. One player sends raw potatoes barreling down onto the table, and the other attempts to smash them before they fall to the floor. Each table has a different label, such as "the antipiracy machine" or the "antimonopoly machine," with satirical instructions on the wall linking the playful task to a larger social issue. At the opening, the room looked like a vodka factory, its floor strewn with half-mashed potatoes.

More subtle projects risk being overlooked, but are worth careful study. Onejoon Che (Korea) contributed "Undercooled" (2006-08), a thoughtful and slightly scary series of photographs that depict the remains of old military installations scattered throughout the Korean landscape. Anetta Mona Chisa (Romania) and Lucia Tkacova (Slovakia) present a collaborative video, *Dialectics of Subjections #4* (2006), that shows two teenage girls giggling at a slumber party while they dish about the lack of sexual charisma of major world leaders, from George W. Bush to North Korea's Kim Jong Il. My best-in-show award goes to Lene Berg (Norway) for *Stalin by Picasso* or *Portrait of Woman with Mustache*

**RECOGNITION  
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LEFT, HOY-CHEONG WONG: LIGHTBOX PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE "MAID IN MALAYSIA" SERIES, 2008, ONE OF 10, APPROX. 5 BY 10 FEET.

ABOVE LEFT, MIEKE GERRITZEN: *BEAUTIFUL WORLD*, 2006, VIDEO, APPROX. 20 MINUTES.

RIGHT, DOCUMENTATION OF SAŠO SEDLACEK'S *BEGGAR ROBOT*, 2008, INTERACTIVE PUBLIC INSTALLATION.

BELOW, LIU WEI: *A DAY TO REMEMBER*, 2005, VIDEO, 13 MINUTES, COURTESY TAIPEI BIENNIAL.



When asked if the Taipei survey he helped direct should be known as the "anti-globalism biennial," Vasif Kortun answered, "Yes," without a shred of irony.

(2008), a thoroughly charming video using collage and animation to tell the story of Picasso's contribution to the French weekly *Les Lettres Françaises* on the occasion of Stalin's death. Ardent Communists asserted that the charcoal drawing of a young Stalin was too bourgeois and too much like a typical Picasso portrait of a woman, with a mustache added. (Picasso, himself nominally a Communist, worried that the portrait would one day be viewed as merely "too kind.") In addition to its departure from the strictly documentary mode, this video is one of the few works on view that question whether there could ever be a truly happy marriage between art and politics.

Several biennial projects are sited around the city as public interventions. Outside the Taipei Brewery, a plant still in operation, Bert Theis (Luxembourg/Italy) installed *Asian Pentagon*, an openwork pavilion made of bamboo. Inside the brewery is a multiscreen video by Democracia (Spain) showing one of the two collaborative artists using a tractor to tear down a ghetto outside of Madrid, to the cheers of bystanders. At the Zhongxiao Xinsheg subway station, a series of billboard-size lightboxes by Hoy-Cheong Wong (Malaysia) display photographs of scenes staged as allegories for the conditions of Malaysian domestic workers in Taiwan. And on Qidong Street, in a neighborhood that still bears traces of the Japanese occu-

pation of Taiwan in the first half of the 20th century, artist Lara Almarcegui (Spain/Netherlands) removed an enclosure wall on a side street to expose an abandoned Japanese house on the verge of collapse.

While little in the biennial pointedly criticizes China, the current global power most affecting the quality of life in Taiwan, the survey stands as a counterpoint to shows like the Shanghai Biennale, where intervention by the ministry of culture is always apparent. Mainland artist Liu Wei's *A Day to Remember* (2005), at the museum, not-so-subtly underscores the contrast between the two countries. In this video, the artist starts at Beijing University and then moves on to Tiananmen Square on June 4, 2005, the sixteenth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, asking strangers if they know what day it is. Though most acknowledge that it is an important day, only one will answer his question, while others immediately shy away from the camera. This state of fear stands in stark contrast to the audacity of the protesters in Ressler's video or the flamboyant anarchy in International Errorista's display. The fact that Liu's video (and many of the other works in this biennial) could be shown in Taiwan but not in mainland China spotlights the benefits of a biennial in a free society, while not-so-subtly indicting the mammoth nation across the straits.

It is difficult to criticize curators who challenge art-market trends and willingly take on political projects, implicitly endorsing outright political activism, as is the case in this Taipei Biennial. In fact, Kortun and Hsu should be commended for including criticism of their host country, in works such as Bejenaru's stowaway video and Delier's *Shijou tribe project*. But political engagement need not mean abandonment of nuance, metaphor and creative use of materials, as has been proven by many artists—Paul Chan, Mika Rottenberg and Josephine Meckseper spring immediately to mind. Relying on artworks rooted, one way or another, in a documentary tradition turned this biennial into an esthetically conservative affair, eliminating other possibilities that might have breathed new life into the issues at hand.

**A Sugar & Fat Free Review of Taipei Biennial 2008:  
(When) Global Attacks On A Local Paradise**

**ADNAN YILDIZ**

**a) Taipei City Context and Curators' Approach**

After landing at the Taipei International Airport, on my way to the hotel, I was listening to my taxi driver's choice of program which apparently was broadcasting the morning news in Mandarin. All I understood was the same word being repeated in English and a country name ("America"). Probably the reporter was talking about the financial crisis, which is the biggest since the Great Depression of 1929: "depression, depression, depression." Even if it is a global "depression" that is closing in on us from every point of the world economy, it did not so much depress me at that moment. In fact, I kind of liked the way it was becoming a pastiche of itself, as in a Dadaist performance. It may be a global depression but I was in a local paradise.

At that time, maybe because of jetlag and cultural disorientation, I had not realized that this small incident would come back to my mind during my stay in Taipei visiting the Biennial show. Travelling into the capital Taipei by taxi, moving from the suburban outskirts into the center, I had a chance to watch how the urban sprawl has been changing Taipei's face throughout different sections of the city: here some abandoned houses and factories, there newly developed housing estates, and old gardens making way for apartments... Old letter types and logos faded away between bright signs of led lights, huge advertising and mobile companies' billboards.

Since the 1950s Taiwan has grown from an agricultural country into the model of a developing industrial society. Since then, the island state has seen many changes and transformations. China always casts its powerful shadow over the country, and whilst America is Taiwan's chosen ally against this threat, Japan is influential on its industry and fashion business; Taiwan was once heavily Japanized and there are still many from the older generation who speak fluent Japanese. Expanding into an urban city within a short time period, Taipei has experienced all the challenges of transport, tourism, and the service industry. Moreover, it is developing its own synthesis of global identity, following the track "think globally and act locally."

Taipei Biennial 2008, which is curated by Manray Hsu and Vassf Kortun, aims to present a large-scale panorama of today's neo-liberal capitalist globalization through diverse positions and statements. Bringing together 47 artists with their projects that have either been commissioned or re-adapted, the Biennial looks at global issues in their specific local context. In their statement, the curators underline that Taipei Biennial has always been embraced by the citizens of Taipei, and their primary aim was to create a platform for local people to generate a collective public discussion, which will hopefully continue after the show closes rather than focusing on an international/professional audience as a reference as so many internationally recognized Biennials do.

This is the Biennial's working strategy in terms of the links between the organizational structure, its budget and target audience who pays the entrance fee. Taipei Biennial is organized by Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) as part of its official program. A majority of the Biennial's installations and events take place at the museum.

Kortun and Hsu have developed an interdependent structure in the city between institutions and individual projects, and this structure has already triggered a discussion through one of the pieces in the show: Jun Yang's proposal which asks an interesting question, "How \_\_\_\_ a contemporary art center \_\_\_\_ in Taipei?" for a city, where the local art market has already begun to connect with the international market. It is clear that the Biennial audience is not provided with a "happy meal menu" show with a "tops of the pops" artist list, but an exhibition, which is primarily based on an honest and natural relationship with the city. The audience is included in the discussions

throughout. This strategy turns into an efficient starting point where the show not only works for the local audience, but also for the professional/international art scene. Moreover, the context sensitivity, which this approach produces, covers the whole map of the show and creates a ground for the audience. As mentioned before, most of the installation is staged at the TFAM, however the audience can easily forget that s/he is in a museum setting since the installation is smartly penetrated into that context; rather than an institutional representation, it is more like an alternative form of discussion about today's economical and political spheres of liberalism. That's why it is not only for the audience, but also for the global players to see how transparent it is as a ground.

At the end of the day, the Biennial in Taipei happens to be as the curators wrote in their text: "every situation is specific".

#### b) The Exhibition Guide as a Tool of Democracy

The exhibition at Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) is the heart and soul of the Biennial program. From the entrance of the museum to the second floor the works are positioned as open-ended discussions and reflexive proposals. A collective from Argentina, Internacional Errorista, welcomes the viewer with an installation that looks like a stage for a demonstration, what is left after a real one; papers on the ground and moments from the memory; politicians, politics, and public voters in the public space. The term Internacional Errorista is conceived from The Errorists that first appeared as a protest group during the visit of George W. Bush to the Summit of Americas in Mar del Plata in 2005. This performing art practice continues its process just after the action in the lobby of the museum, taking over the 'empty' public space, which is run/rent/sold by state money. How you define "museum" and think about its relation with economy and state also engages you in a discussion about the way you perceive the state economy: a) as a capitalist form of control, b) a national power that keeps the borders, or c) a trans-global entity, which transmits its local values into market dynamics. The collective not only questions the audience by their absent presence but also provides a persona, which could be also reflected again and again on the audience, for them; the audience is given a stage where they can perform their virtual citizenship in their own understanding and experience their possible participation in any demonstration they have been, a) as a demonstrator, b) as a member of the police force, or c) as a speaker.

The multiplicity of shadow identities creates a silent comedy in the space like a sort of 2008 version of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The installation also makes the museum staff more visible in the lobby when they move. Instead of seeing them as usual in an institutional emptiness like a sort of Matrix background the audience now sees them as figures on a stage of shadow characters. For instance, as far as I saw, almost all the museum guards were middle aged or elderly, fewer men than women who sat at their desk all day, drinking green tea with a social smile and dressed like stewardesses or stewards. In this installation, where everything looks as if it is a stage for a Brechtian play, that looks like the two dimensional characters are aware of the presence of the audience and the other characters in the museum as guards or hosts, these attendants all looked like "aged" flight nannies for First Class kids; as if you were a child of six or seven and you have flown too far into the atmosphere, where the air staff on the plane has aged and you also have become adult. The Errorists play with your imagination in a delicate manner of transforming an institutional space into a possibly real but conceptually artistic experience.

Seso Sedlacek's *Beggar Robot* is the second stop in the show. Passing it, the robot moves its hands towards you—like a beggar—since it has sensors and the hands move like those of real beggars on the street. This work is about how humans are becoming robots on the streets in order to survive, "public space animals" that try to survive by selling the most private aspect of their life, their misery. This robot in the museum is also like a proposal; Sedlacek suggests that "by applying do-it-yourself strategies and participating in open source and common goods, we can create a more inclusive environment for the growing number of people who feel excluded, disposed, or simply unsatisfied with the mainstream." This robot is allowed to enter to a museum,

which a beggar—under normal conditions—cannot enter; they cannot pass through the security, which is manned by police officers paid by the state. Nasan Tur's *Backpacks* comes next, with videos that show public space actions and bags, which are used/to be re-used for these actions. They all create a conceptual imagination; invisible "tourist" profiles; artists, curators, audience as tourists—mobile entities in the public domain.

Shaun Gladwell's videos are also about actions, but he appears (or performs) in his pieces with an abstracted style of movement; they are urban expressions (on a motorbike or a bus) as poetically beautiful statements. Lene Berg's video piece *Stalin by Picasso or Portrait of Woman with Moustache*, a delicate film episode about art history and politics, is about a drawing by Picasso. The drawing is produced on the occasion of Stalin's death and commissioned by Aragon for *Les Lettres Françaises*. The historicity of the discussion about artistic freedom and political ideologies is the reference point of the artist as a contributor to the Biennial. Berg reflexively staged a historical example with a conceptually designed storyboard or a desktop film, which fictionalizes an experiment done by Picasso during the Cold War. Focusing on one drawing, she created a discussion about what an artist can/might/must/should/shouldn't articulate through a political party (in this case the Communist Party) or another public media. Roderick Buchanan's video *Here I am* that simultaneously shows two bands marching next to each other complements Berg's work: one video calls for the removal of British heritage in Ireland, other is for preserving the British heritage.

The show gains momentum in the following sections where it becomes clear that a globalist point of view is being challenged by new politics and critics in the public space, as in the form of site-specific intervention by Lara Almarcegui or an investigation on border control by IRWIN. It continues with artistic reflections: Christodoulos Panayiotou's archeological research of "ready made" images from Cyprus turns into a site-sensitive slide projection installation; Mario Rizzi's film, which is about two foreign women (an Indonesian and a Vietnamese) in Taipei deconstructs the orientation of the context of the biennial and tries to create a balance between diverse modes of Orientalism, and Self-Orientalism; and Bbrother's wall painting (for/in a museum) as a graffiti is organically connected to Cheng-ta Yu's documentary videos of his public space intervention on the street.

Some artists helped me to sort out Burak Delier's *Counter Attack*, a decoratively designed documentation of a social intervention (or another neighborhood project), a temporary public installation in form of a huge banner—installed with the participation of the schools and a young community—over the houses of Shijou Community. The work is based on the sad story of Shijou construction workers who worked on the contemporary architectural projects Taipei 101, and whose houses now are on the brink of destruction. The banner carries the words "We Will Win". The statement was written in English as the banner was "speaking up to the heights", thus communicating directly with airplanes, skyscrapers, and others (big brothers) who control and watch us from above (as a counter attack). But there was a question: "Who decides what to say for whom?"

An artist who is also showing in the Biennial, Jun Yang has answered my question: "What to say was already decided before getting on the plane to Taipei, so it was like a closed discussion, how can you speak for these people just after staying one week or ten days in the city? A generous gesture and a brave heart? If he were a local artist doing this, then it wouldn't be such a nice story on the museum wall..."

On the second floor, the exhibition continued with a video-based surface which reflects a wide variety of video content ranging from diverse artistic to activist approaches. The presented artists such as Nevin Aladağ, Ziad Antar, Anetta Mosa Chisa and Lucia Tkacova, Nicoline van Harskamp, The Yes Men all share critical positions as well as similar humorous tonalities. Katya Sander's installation, a 3D visual experience positioned between the videos, shows the four different views from the museum into the surrounding landscapes; one is the real landscape to be seen from the window of the room, whereas three others show recorded material. The installation

does not only function as an architectural stage but also interacts with the other works in the show as a research-based, site-specific installation. This makes for the most interesting twist in the show: a formalistic and site-specific approach that ends up with a critical transformation of its own context, extending its conceptual approach and opening a virtually distorted panorama for the viewer who looks at it through a museum perspective. The distortion of perception is complemented by the illusion of the exotic, namely Kuang-yu Tsui's *Invisible City: Taipei York* which reproduces international cultural heritage such as the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty and puts them in a Taipei context, thus transforming them into local everyday situations or teasers made of postcards.

The second floor is composed of installation units; rooms host different project-based collaborations such as IAA, Superflex, The Yes Men etc. Various forms of presenting research and practice together, combining performance with documentary and interaction, create a vivid and dynamic platform that demonstrates how contemporary artists produce global strategies to get in touch with local realities. One of them is Superflex with a playful installation. They produced *Free Beer* for the Taipei Biennial audience and designed an alternative economy to make the buyer-seller relationship more visible (and at the same time maybe even more abstract) in the museum context in terms of its production, circulation and collaborative identity under the Creative Commons license.

There is also an artist-curated exhibition at the Biennial, *A World Where Many Worlds Fit* by Oliver Ressler. However, the show is not as promising as its name but more or less a didactic scenario and a dry statement that makes it easy for the audience to anticipate the end of the story. So most likely, people do not keep watching till the end. Rather than taking a position or producing something political, it mostly shows people who are involved in political activities or engaged in a discussion. Allan Sekula's slide projection meets with Petra Gerschner's poster—and it cannot compete with the open structure of the Biennial, but becomes a representation of an old story: "Yankee go home". There was one piece I could not part with: Mieke Gerritzen's video *Beautiful World*, something like a moving version of a slot machine that churns out sounds, logos, messages, quotations and effects from global contemporary culture such as *Twin Peaks* or Antonio Negri, bringing about a world of controversy and allegory.

The Taipei Biennial map includes a metro station, Taipei Beer Factory, and some other spots in the city. In my opinion, the show at the beer factory should have more material inside, or put differently, the organizers should make more efficient use of it as it is—both architecturally and contextually—the most challenging and interesting venue on the map. Instead of stuffing the museum space with most of the pieces, Taipei Beer Factory (Taipei Brewery) might open a new contextual and open frame for some of the works like Nasan Tur's *Backpacks* or Superflex's *Free Beer*. At the point when it starts to trigger the visitor to look at the factory again, the show suddenly ends with an art historical gesture: Didier Fiuza Faustino's installation that provides a chance of experiencing Yves Klein's legendary proposal from 1960, *Leap into the Void*. Definitely, the beer factory needs more input.

The Madrid based collective Democracia's monumentally beautiful and politically poetic installation, including a multi screen projection of a film about the demolition of El Salobral in Madrid, creates a unique environment that puts ghetto life in a contemporary context and leaves a very strong impression. For me, a question like "What is the end of globalization going to look like in the neo-liberal capitalist societies?" has become more and more apparent and dominant during my walk between The Errorists and Democracia. While the first serves more as a parody of public space, redefining it as "the territory of power", the second is a lyrical epilogue about a real situation of legal terror which turns into a homage to the people living in the ghetto.

### c) Global Hell and Local Paradise

Taipei Biennial has been developed as a reflexive and a critical discourse against the mainstream politics of today's neo-liberal society. Globalization means more than a factory in China shutting

down because they cannot sell their denims to Americans any longer who, in turn, start to lose their jobs because of the financial crisis, since the American banking system, which is based on borrowing and consuming, also affects the Chinese markets. If America is not going to buy all these consumer goods anymore, since they can't pay back their credit card loans, then what for is China going to produce all these products? To whom are they going to be sold? The global crises also decode the global traffic of capitalism, which has been organized on the condition of buying and selling without any logic. But this is not the whole story; globalization also means that a 15 year old girl who works for 60 cent an hour at that denim factory also borrows money to be able to buy pills that help her stay awake during her night shift. How can any economist explain this? How the global economy attacks the local paradise is the real story.

In one of his early writings, Walter Benjamin reflected on capitalism as: "Capitalism is a religion of pure cult, without dogma. Capitalism has developed as a parasite of Christianity in the West (this must be shown not just in the case of Calvinism, but in the other orthodox Christian churches), until it reached the point where Christianity's history is essentially that of its parasite—that is to say, of capitalism." In a nutshell, what he emphasizes is positioning capitalism as a religion that he focuses on the pure cult without any dogma. Capitalism needed a kind of common optimism, a general believe in its promises of happiness and liberty. Moreover in a time of a major economic crisis, this always reduces the "glorification" of capitalism and of economy and along with this process neoliberal arguments about deregulation as the way to universal troubleshooting are losing their power of persuasion. That is why the local territories, which still have some of their traditional ~~ad~~ moral values, beauties, and patterns (that have not been transformed after capitalist revolution) look like a local paradise... where you can escape from the harsh capitalist models, but at the end find the most direct and wild face of it.

During my visit, Taipei Biennial has sounded like a melody for me, a melody that stays in the memory, sometimes fragile, sometimes disturbing, but always real. All the time I remembered that the new world turns around money and capital, and then there is no sun for free. The Biennial as a show is a generous attempt—not stuck in its ambition, audience, budget and borders, but also aware of its limitations and edges. It has a lot of stories for its audience. Let us keep in mind: it is not easy to be generous in a world that the official global language belongs to buyers and sellers, they are the ones who rule.

## INTERVIEWS WITH ARTISTS

Bbrother

Adnan Yıldız How do you think showing at Taipei Biennial will (or has) influence(d) your practice?

Bbrother Well, it is the first time that I am shown in a museum as a "graffiti writer". When you paint on the street at night with a bag of 12 spray cans and a climbing rope, it is just a matter of being busted or not. However, when you are in a museum, you have to deal with many other things, such as curators, executives and your audience which is, you are in the system now. To me, graffiti is an unrestricted way to express myself, to speak to different people in unexpected ways. Being in the show, you can only choose "one way". Your audience has been selected and they are already trained to see your work as an art piece. I think, showing at Taipei Biennial reveals the contrary roles of being an artist and being a graffiti writer.

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Cheng-ta Yu

Adnan Yıldız How do you think showing at Taipei Biennial will (or has) influence(d) your practice?

Cheng-ta Yu It is a great opportunity for me, especially as I am still a student. It gives me a wonderful experience to work with international curators, artists and a museum as well. It is a good start for my art life and I treasure it.

AY How is the local audience responding to the Biennial and particularly to your work in this context?

CY I googled some blogs about 2008 Taipei Biennial and found lots of responses from the local audience who seems to like it very much. This exhibition shows something about Taipei in a humorous way; it makes people realize what the works really say and what the idea of the show is. I am also happy about getting some positive feedback on my work. Lots of people told me that they watched all of the videos and loved them. Especially on the weekend, people have to line up for watching my videos. Really unbelievable!

AY What does the Biennial mean for Taipei?

CY The most important point of Taipei Biennial is not publicity for this city. I think it is a good event for developing the artistic practice in Taiwan. Taiwan is a small island in Asia, and particularly our art history is not too long. The Biennial is a standard for art people and provides a new vision for Taipei. In this respect, Taipei Biennial 2008 did really a good job for Taipei.

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Kuang-yu Tsui

Adnan Yıldız What does the Biennial mean for Taipei?

Kuang-yu Tsui The First Taipei Biennial was cutting-edge among Asian countries and the sort of show that helped promote the city. But later the focus transferred slowly towards the quality of the Biennial itself. Now it finds its position again. Of course there is some competition between Asian countries, but it seems to be meaningful to build a platform and connect Taiwan to other artists and put it in an international context.

For example, this time you can find that many technical resource and education systems as well as the art community in Taipei are involved in and supporting the Biennial. It is a good opportunity for both sides (especially for local ventures) to engage and know what is happening inside or outside Taiwan. Maybe this is not true for all participants and locals, but it is still something valuable for some. I do not expect local or international artists could really react to this Biennial or Taipei City, but what matters is the process of people communicating with each other.

Adnan Yıldız (b. 1979) is a curator and a writer. He is also co-editor of *Muhtelif*, an Istanbul based contemporary art publication and co-founder of *Good Gangsters* ([www.goodgangsters.com](http://www.goodgangsters.com) and [www.bigfamilybusiness.net](http://www.bigfamilybusiness.net)). He studied psychology (BA, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul) as well as visual arts and culture (MFA, Sabancı University, Istanbul) and later participated in *Curatorlab/Konstfack*, Stockholm, a research based curatorial residency program (2006-2008). Currently he travels back and forth between Berlin and Istanbul for projects that are mostly based on fiction(al space) and audience.

GWANGJU AND TAIPEI

## GWANGJU AND TAIPEI BIENNIALS

Anna Daneri



Hans Haacke, *Wide White Flow*, 1967-2006. Electric fans, white silk fabric. Exhibited as part of "On the Road," Gwangju Biennial, 2008. Installation view. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Gwangju and Taipei Biennials, respectively at their seventh and sixth editions, offer interesting points to reflect on today's state of art. Similar in that neither resort to a leading theme, aware of the impossibility to rigorously 'put in boxes' the complexity of contemporary society and art production, these two exhibitions carry out very different approaches in the choice of the itineraries: poetic-visionary in Gwangju, politic-rebel in Taipei. Curated by Okwui Enwezor, together with international curators Ranjit Hoskote, Hyunjin Kim, Patrick D. Flores, Jang Un Kim, Abdellah Karroum, Sung-Hyun Park and Claire Tancons, the Gwangju Biennial focuses on the concept of collective authoriality that can account for "a critical transregionalism; to configure new continents of affinity, which correspond more genuinely to our desires and aspirations than the geographer's superseded, merely physical, fictions. When we show, tell, and read across cultures, we don't only traverse cultural differences. Crucially, we also traverse different relations between poetics and politics, between expressiveness and criticality, as phrased by individual artists." (Ranjit Hoskote). With the aim to carry out a detailed reconnaissance on the present of the art, by following critical lines that seem to develop and get over the more purely "political" approach

revealed in Documenta XI, Enwezor and the whole GB7 team have conceived an operating curatorial structure in accordance with a non-unitary, even less univocal, concept of space and time. Hence the decision to title the Biennial "Annual Report." The exhibition is fluidly composed, with sections that display some of the most significant exhibitions presented in museums, galleries and nonprofit spaces during the 18 months before the Biennial ("On the Road"), along with curatorial experiments ("Position Papers") and a broad number of commissioned projects ("Insertions"). This "open" and articulate look is echoed in the works of the 127 artists on show, linked by a poetic force that seems to meet the exhibition's statement of openness: "Art should be flexible enough to act as an index for the future and a reflection of present realities, yet be rich and mature enough to maintain traditional values in our lives and thinking." In venues all around the city, including a cinema, the Uijae Museum, dedicated to the master of Korean modern art, and a traditional market that the Biennial projects intend to revitalize in the long term, many visual and visionary universes unfold, among them the harrowing installation by Isaac Julien, on the tragedy of migrants drowned in the Sicily sea (*Western Union: Small Boats*, 2007), the itinerary

in the dark of Ken Lum's work, the installation of carpets and drawings by Stefano Arienti (*The Asian Shore*, 2007), the small and intense pictures realized by Praeet Soi (*Distaster of war*, 2007), the surreal and alienating video by Nina Fischer & Maroan El Sani (*Spelling Dystopia*, 2008) and the works and performances of the young Cuban artists who are students of Tanja Bruguera (*Arte de Conducta*).

However, it is perhaps the experiment curated by Claire Tancons — to organize a show in the form of a parade-manifestation by drawing on the subversive practices of carnival (Spring) — that deeply embodies the feel of the Gwangju Biennial, since the causes of its foundation retrace the places of the bloody popular revolt against dictatorship in May 1980.

Counting on more limited means in comparison to Gwangju (second only to Documenta in terms of budget and visitors), the Taipei Biennial, curated by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, presents works that in the main were produced for the occasion and which investigate the present and explore possible alternatives for the future. The decision to leave the walls that separate the works "unfinished" denotes the will of the curators to concentrate on the essentiality and necessity, beyond an empty idea of 'beauty,' of an ecological approach towards reality. The city of Taipei is pervasively scattered with works

that compete with the working beer factory, such as the installation by Bert Theis, created according to traditional building techniques in bamboo, forming a meeting and resting place for both workers and visitors (*Asian Pentagon*, 2008).

A lightbox by Hoy-Cheong Wong portrays in an epic way the job of the migrant carers seen as heroines (*Maid in Malaysia Series*, 2008) and the question of speculative building is raised through the "valorisation" of an old house in ruin in a piece by Lara Almarazgui (*Removing the Wall of a Ruined House, Qidong Street*, 2008). Works characterized by a more explicit denouncement, such as the video by Mario Rizzi on the trade of wife-slaves in Taiwan (*The Chicken Soup*, 2008) or the film by Matei Bejenaru on the Taiwanese ship that threw Romanian migrants into the sea (*Maersk Dubai*, 2006-2008), are alternated with projects of practice, such as the actions of Mali Wu on climatic change and energy problems (*Taipei Tomorrow as a Lake Again*), or the oneiric re-appropriation of the no man's land between Ramallah and Jerusalem enacted by fantastical bread-made beings by Yochai Avrahami (*Rocks Ahead*, 2006-2008), until we close with the rhythm produced by the simple beat of our own body in the video by Ziad Antar's *Tambourro* (2004).

(Translated from Italian by Francesca Cogoni)

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# 6th Taipei Biennial

seem to be in place: in her handover briefing with the technician the director laconically remarks that unfortunately this year's acquisitions budget has already been used up. What has taken place here? Is the exchange of roles in effect merely staged, or is it actually affecting the institution's infrastructure with incalculable results? Ultimately it's impossible to tell whether or not such a risk was ever really taken.

One might ask, however, if it really matters whether the exchange of roles was actually sustained in everyday working life during the entire run-up to the show. It should suffice that the story in the film is convincing. After all, Jankowski's work to date has focused more on questions of belief between artist and audience. He has often delegated the realization of his works to specialists in faith: a television astrologer made prophetic predictions about the artist's life and work (*Telemistica*, 1999), and a professional public speaker delivered a fitting eulogy for all the artists short-listed for a prestigious art award (*Congratulations*, 2000). The recent series of commissioned paintings, ordered by Jankowski from Chinese copyists (*China Painters*, 2007) also bring together belief, prophecy and art: photographs of the unfinished shell of a Chinese art museum supplied a backdrop against which the painters were asked to paint their ideal image of a future exhibition there. In these delegations Jankowski is able productively to test both his own role as an artist and that of his accomplices in the context of economic and media frameworks. Unfortunately, in *Briefing* the artist largely fails to reflect on his own activity.

It is true that a few of the ideas proposed by staff members in the film were actually realized in the exhibition. An African artist, a friend of the new curator's from the cleaning staff, was allowed to hang several of his brightly coloured canvases in the show. But when the protagonists are followed into situations that reveal nothing but their shortcomings, the humour is not subtle any more and becomes cynical. The museum's new funding manager, actually employed as a caretaker, is hopeful of securing fresh money as he sets off for a meeting with the sponsorship department of a well-known fashion company. But the caretaker's communicative skills quickly fail him, and after a few minutes his interlocutor from the PR department shows him the door with a mixture of professional friendliness and veiled discomfort.

The exhibition catalogue perfectly highlights the project's dilemma. The freshly appointed director is allowed to pen an amusing foreword, and the new curator conducts a brief interview with the artist, but then the game is over. Obviously the 'actual' director could not refrain from adding an afterword in form of an 'erratum' note. As usual, the 'former' curator and several 'former' curatorial assistants exercise their defining authority over the meaning of the artist's work in a number of essays. Jankowski's attempt to turn an institution's working methods on their heads, at least within the parameters of his own art work, gets lost somewhere between a parody of business consulting and scripted reality television.

**Burkhard Meltzer**

Translated by Nicholas Grindell



Ziad Antar  
Wa  
2004  
Video still

## Various venues, Taipei, Taiwan

All too often, international stopover curators pay little heed to the intelligence of the home audience or art community. But the 6th Taipei Biennial paid respect to its location by presenting works fresh to Taipei and integrating a significant number of local artists and concerns. Biennial curators sometimes forget that the home crowd may have existed for years without recognition beyond their own region, and therefore might have high hopes for the exhibition to produce a critical dialogue noticed at home and abroad. But word on the street in Taipei was positive, which dampened my initial scepticism about the focus on artists already associated with the curators.

Like many recent biennials, this exhibition was essentially 'about' the host city. Curators Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun imagined their exhibition as an enquiry into the neo-liberal redevelopment of Taipei in the time period since the launch of the Biennial in the late 1990s. Taipei is the world's principal producer of Internet router and modem technology, and is prospering accordingly. As

societies grow financially they tend to cede their menial labour to migrant workers, and the situation in Taiwan is no different. A number of works in the exhibition addressed the fate of immigrants from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam who bear that burden. This was one of the Biennial's enlightening aspects, as discourses of migration in art tend to concentrate on east-to-west and south-to-north movements, obviating east-east and south-south economies. I was unaware that mail-order brides or human sex trafficking were so prevalent in Taipei until I watched *Chicken Soup* (2008) by Mario Rizzi - a documentary video shot in Vietnam about a young Vietnamese woman forced into the sex industry in Taiwan (but who managed to escape home).

The more widespread topics of urban redevelopment and encroachment of private interests on public spaces are addressed in site-specific projects located around the city such as Lara Almarcegui's *An Empty Terrain in the Danshui River, Taipei* (2008), aimed at saving an inner-city wetland; Burak Delier's *Counter Attack: The Intervention Team* (2008), a protest against shrinking indigenous community housing; and Jun Yang's *Contemporary Art Centre, Taipei (A Proposal, 2008)*, which promulgated the establishment of a contemporary art centre in Taipei. The →



Lara Almarcegui  
*An Empty Terrain in the  
Danshui River, Taipei*  
2008  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable

Biennial's principal venue, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, housed works by 43 of the 47 participating artists and artistic groups. The temporary walls within the museum were left raw or unfinished, producing a *déshabillé* effect. The show was divided into two thematic sections: the major part of Hsu and Kortun's exhibition; and a section curated by Oliver Ressler, 'A World Where Many Worlds fit', a display of archival material and art works produced via artist-led social activism and focusing on actions conducted at the WTO, IMF, WEF and G8 summits since 1999. Fortunately, the curators included enough politically oriented work in the other part of the exhibition to avoid making Ressler's contribution seem ancillary.

There was also enough humour throughout the Biennial for a productive coexistence of comedy and *realpolitik*. Humour is too thin on the ground in most biennials, even in Taiwan, a region well known in Asia for its comic turn. Luckily it was in evidence here: the best-known Taiwanese slapstick performance artist Kuang-yu Tsui presented a new multi-channel video installation *Invisible City: Taipari York* (2008) in which domestic soap operas are played out in the shadows of architectural icons (the Eiffel Tower, the Brooklyn Bridge), which are later revealed to be reproductions of these monuments, located in Taipei suburbs.

In their respective videos, Turkish artist Nevin Aladag and Lebanese artist Ziad Antar compose DIY electronic music and home videos of rapping, break-dancing and singing. Aladag's video *Family Tezcan* (2001) reveals that African-American street culture can be a potent source of self-transformation for a Turkish family displaced in Germany. Antar's combination of two children, a Casiotone and one note could easily be a chart-topper; titled *Wa* (2004), the video shows the kids with their synthesizer, singing 'Wa' instead of 'La'. Both of these works reveal that talent and self-belief, even when possessed by six-year-olds, is potent enough to trump the excesses of *Pop Idol* and MTV, and provide a giggle. *Dialectics of Subjection #4*, Anetta Mona Chisa and Lucia Tkacova's video of two Russian girls in their 20s lying in bed in their pyjamas discussing the relative sexiness of world leaders, is not your average

yardstick: 'George Bush's eyes are too close together and he looks like a monkey. Tony Blair's alright but his ears are too big. And as for Prince Charles his eyes are even closer than Dubya's and ears bigger than Blair. Putin is just alright ...' It's a refreshing reminder that the Internet generation doesn't believe in what it reads and sees, despite the best efforts of makeovers and 'spin'.

Malaysian artist Wong Hoy-Cheong installed *Maid in Malaysia* (2008), a pristine suite of light boxes, in a downtown MRT station (the new Metro system symbolizes Taipei's regeneration). It is hard to distinguish Wong's light boxes from the regular commercial product – especially the one at the station's entrance advertising his '0800-Super Maids' from Southeast Asia (with requisite free-dial and Internet listing details), depicting a smiling child tucked under the arm of a flying and caped domestic crusader. The light boxes at platform level are more narrative than advertorial, each one showing another amazing service that a 'super maid' can provide for your day, ranging from the prosaic task of getting your child to school on time to the heroic act of disarming a group of gun-toting burglars. In this image, even the husband stands cowering behind his 'super maid'. There's the rub: economies of exploitation are emasculating and represent a failure of self-respect. One hopes that Taiwanese commuters are now wise to the fact that affluence and progress, such as the MRT that is endlessly celebrated on each station's plasma screens, can generate some social ills – and contemporary art has a role to play in raising social awareness.

Simon Rees

# Giuseppe Gabellone

greengrassi, London, UK

Giuseppe Gabellone's art is always somewhere else. With a deft sleight of hand, his sculptures leap between dimensions, collapse into photographic images or, like a rabbit from a hat, re-emerge into life. Gabellone's ontologically uncertain work has a specific heritage traceable back to the Land art of the 1970s, which inadvertently flattened vast clumps of Utah desert by the simple action of depressing a shutter release. Robert Smithson's massive *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on Utah's Great Salt Lake is really a film; Michael Heizer's spectacular hillocks appear today, squashed like daisies, between the pages of coffee-table books. Sculpture today must contend with photography's unmatched powers of storytelling; the object's traditional mnemonic purpose as memorial or epitaph has been usurped. Sculptural monuments, we might conclude, are doomed to obscurity, to squat and rot in far-flung places.

Gabellone acts as a counterforce, siphoning power back into the sculptural carcass. In an untitled work from 1997 the artist encased an entire stretch of street – car, pavement, barrel and nearby wall – in robust steel plating, as if he had followed the logic of car wheel-clamps to its most absurd conclusion. This, not coincidentally, is also the brutish logic behind civic monuments:

Giuseppe Gabellone  
*L'Assetato  
(The Thirsty)*  
2007  
Iron

Sculpture: 120×42×22 cm  
Pedestal: 80×112×112 cm



## © **Taipei Biennale attacks globalization, commercialization of the art world**

By **Chris Gill** (Art Newspaper)

Taipei Arts Museum launched its sixth biennale this month, the untitled '2008 Taipei International Biennial of Contemporary Art' hosting a tightly curated series of art works from predominately anti-capitalist and anti-globalization focused artists.

"The chaos of globalization made us want to do an exhibition like this," curator Man Ray Hsu said. "Other biennales (in China) are now too attached to the market system, commercial, gallery, driven, with pompous and vacuous catalogues, which they use for sales. Artists should reconsider their role in society," Hsu said.

The show, which features very few works by Chinese artists, has one work by a mainland artist (Liu Wei) and four by Taiwanese artists. The remainder are by an eclectic collection of global artists whose work in some way reflects Hsu's vision of highlighting anti-capitalist and anti-globalization art.

Liu Wei's video work 'a day to remember' had to be smuggled into Taiwan, Hsu revealed, after Beijing authorities would not let it leave the country. The work consists of a series of uncomfortable interviews with people on the street on the anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre.

Argentina's Errorista art group dominated the lobby with a large demonstration against the war on terror.

A specially curated room by Oliver Ressler "a world where many worlds fit" consisted of a combination of artworks from artist demonstrators across the globe, celebrating the history of demonstrations in recent years, against the G8 and other perceived globalizing bodies.

"There was no censorship whatsoever," Hsu said.

[Taipei \(pronounced TaiBei\) short review](#)  
[Damin Hirst DIY](#) »

### **The China Triangle**

Here's a summary review of the three big shows. Don't mention Nanjing, shh, cos then it would be a square, and squares aren't cool....



The China Triangle, like the Bermuda triangle, but art related

The China triangle- A tale of two biennales and a triennial  
For anyone with a serious interest in following China's art scene it has been a tough month so far, with hundreds of art events all happening at the same time, with only Typhoon Sinlaku interrupting the tightly arranged schedules. Censors, curators, artists and gallerists, art fairs and major art events, all vied for the attention of buyers, a very thin on the ground press pack, critics, pickers, collectors, and the populace of the region, with visitors flying in from around the globe.

Shanghai Biennale, Guangzhou Triennial and Taipei Biennial all opened in the same week this month, and despite being within two hours travel by plane, each offered diversely competing visions on the future of contemporary art in the region.

Guangzhou attempted to engage in heavyweight intellectual discourse with the artists and audience, and established a 'discussion in progress,' with three curators, and seven artist curators, who offered different visions and interpretations on the theme – "Farewell to Post Colonialism".

Shanghai wanted to make a more local statement, highlighting the city as the center of a fast moving and fast growing society, examining the trend of urbanization, and its impact on local societies, under the theme "Translocalmotion."

Taipei conversely, with its untitled biennial, made a global statement

on anti-capitalism, the war on terror and anti-globalization and is very critical of commercialism in the art world, especially China.

Curator Man Ray Hsu said biennials are becoming too gallery driven, especially in China, and he specifically avoided recruiting commercially successful artists to make his statement on the "chaos of globalization."

These three unique shows hinted at the diversity of the region, which is usually regarded as an indigenous whole. But if we do look at all three shows as a whole the overwhelming message is the region is entering an era of post westernization as it establishes its own new brash identity.

In Guangzhou, a sprawling city on the banks of the Pearl River, the Guangdong Art Museum hosted an anarchic show with artists covering local political and social issues from Africa, the middle East, China, and other regions. Despite the attentions of the local Communist Party Cultural Bureau the curators and museum director managed to negotiate the majority of works into the show uncensored. Due to the topic of the show, post colonialism, censors were worried some works, such as Zhu Yu's "192 proposals for members of the United Nations" may provoke an international incident, and so some of the texts were blurred. With lots of surprises, in the vast show, a highlight was Lu Jie's work, a revolving door entitled "no foreigners beyond this point," which cut to the heart of the show's message, as audience members of various nationalities hovered around the door, unsure whether to enter, whether they were a 'foreigner'

Curator Serat Maharaj said: "why is this event taking place, in a background of numerous and endless biennales across Asia? It's the hope of opening a civic space for conversation of an everyday kind."

Vice chairman Sir David tang said "my theory is we are as far south as possible, from the capital, so we have the least political control.

This is why Deng Xiaoping chose Shenzhen to try his experiment (of reform). So you find the avant garde here, and the museum is coming to the places people live."

Shanghai's statement was even more local, Artistic director Zhang Qing's aim was to focus on the global topic of migration within the specific context of East China, a region that encompasses 16 cities and 150 million people. "I read in the newspapers that soon we can

travel anywhere in this hub," Zhang told me. "Within an hour we can get to Nanjing by fast train, with bridges connecting cities like Suzhou and Nantong. I couldn't believe it myself what I see in the newspapers – I thought perhaps it is just all big talk, but really it is true. By 2010 Shanghai will have several hundred kilometers of new subway lines. We want to reflect all this energy in the Biennale." But despite Zhang's attempt to put on a very tidy show, with strong work by Yue Mingjun, who specially created a large series of colourful steel dinosaur sculptures for the exhibition, the rowdy audience defeated him. Crowds descended on the exhibition en-masse, pulling, prodding and even riding the art works and generally driving gallery staff to distraction, effectively mirroring the work of Chen Zhiguang, entitled "Migration Times, Ant Paradise." For the artist the ants represent the relentless efforts of migrants to progress in their new adoptive territories, and his sculptures were placed climbing the museums exterior walls.

"This is very similar to problems we had in Taiwan in the 1980s," said Man Ray Hsu, curator of the Taipei event. In Guangzhou and Shanghai more than half the artists were Chinese, but Taipei featured only one work by a Chinese artist – Liu Wei's 'a day to remember' which had to be smuggled into Taiwan, Hsu revealed, and work by four by local Taiwanese artists. Liu Wei's work commemorated the Tiananmen Massacre. The remainder were mostly an eclectic global collection of protest artists. Oliver Ressler curated a room "a world where many worlds fit" focused on the history of recent global protests, and was essentially a school for protesting, a show that would never have been allowed on the mainland, and perhaps that's the point. "There was no censorship whatsoever," Hsu said.

You would have thought that three shows, in such relative geographic proximity, would have coordinated their shows to some extent, at least the opening times, but according to Hsu, there was no communication "at all." Hopefully, next time then.

film :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBPhI3-ofks&url=http://www.shanghaieye.net/english/?p=18video>

