

Havana Biennial 2015

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Abstract

The endless search for a space where visual art, science, music, philosophy, and society meet to produce pure culture is the chief purpose of the next Havana Biennial. In this short communication we offer a vision of the planned and expected environment and result of a cultural event that seems to be breaking with traditional rules of Biennials starting from the analysis of arguments published by some of the most qualified experts.

Keywords: Art; Exhibition; Biennial; Culture; Society; Havana

Introduction

The twelfth Havana Biennial (May 22th - June 22th, 2015), while celebrating the 30th Anniversary, is facing paradigms for answering an ancient question: what is art? [1]. Opening the pathway to an innovative project, the curatorial team of the event remarks: *“resizing atomized work strategies of previous meetings to explore pathways different from mega exhibition (model), though these (strategies) may result in occasional exercises. This turn is part of what has been one of the most precious resources of the Havana’s meeting: feeling the city and its people, equivalent to engage their communities and professional population, their micro-policies and micro-spaces of socialization”* [2]. In this sense, curators will involve architecture, communication, science, habitat, and social inclusion. The project clearly evidences sensibility, fascination with art, and a sense of commitment with civilizing and educative values.

This time, the environment really looks like different: fresh blood is flowing through veins of the Cuban artistic movement, and local scholars have not ignored its complexity and spontaneity. The chief purpose of this edition is generating platforms for discussion forums, from idea to experience, starting from daily life of the City’s inhabitants. In addition, this is an exceptional opportunity for evaluating the resonance of the local artistic movement in the art world, and documenting its actual capacity for facing innovative challenges in open spaces.

Every day, more and more young professionals working in the media can be found everywhere in Cuba, looking for news and offering deep information analysis on almost every subject. So, 200 artists from Afghanistan, Albany, Germany, France, Argentina, Aruba, Austria, Barbados, Belgic, Tunes, Canada, Brazil, Colombia, Congo, Korea, Curacao, Chile, USA, China, Spain, Finland, Guatemala, India, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, México, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Northway, The Netherlands, Peru, Dominican Republic, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Cuba will be under scrutiny of thousands of young reviewers ready to demonstrating a solid intellectual background for creative writing. Reviews and essays written by Aynel M. Hernández, Liz O. Fernández, Williams E. Tolentino, Lolieth M. Delachaux, Darío G. Sánchez, René C. García, Bárbara Avello, Yaíma G. Hernández, Ninna Velgut, and Yanet V. Fontirroche have been published as preludes of intensive critical analyses of the expected evolution of aesthetic concepts in a City that exhibits a well-known cultural heritage [2]. Consequently, aesthetic incoherence and anachronism will be detected almost immediately.

The organizing committee is more interested in *“accompany processes of transdisciplinary creation and intermediation involving both collaborations of investigative and pedagogical nature”*, because

they are sure that critics and reviews will strengthen next editions of the Havana Biennial [2]. The mean thrust of this event seems to be demonstrating benefits of interactions between different fields of knowledge, and documenting results of the contribution of visual art to human development. *“Every project starts a dialogue between artists from different regions, and gives voice to excluded people. The Biennial could be the museum of the contemporary art in Cuba, at least, during one month”*, said Jorge Fernández, Director of the Organizing Committee [3].

As early as in 1989, Rachel Weiss discovered the capacity of the Havana Biennial to modify the traditional model created by Venetians in 1895 [4]. Obviously, by that time, Weiss could not imagine the current scope of this event. After a period of intensive globalization, the Biennial has initiated a more ambitious project: involving pure sciences, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, communication, and networks, in the form of natural integrations of creative processes with society. This is not only a promising idea, but a major requirement to select artists for exhibition in specific places. Music, theatre, film making, architecture and other field of knowledge will participate at the same level of social recognition as painting, sculpture, and other visual arts.

van Hal remarked that *“Havana Biennial and Istanbul Biennial, for instance, both particularly remarkable for the catalyzing effect they had in sparking debate about the so-called periphery”*, and that *“it would take until the nineteen-nineties, when an exponential expansion of the genre occurred”* [5]. Among the founders of the Havana Biennial, Gerardo Mosquera, who has been investigating these meetings for more than 40 years, has remarked that *“we were suffering of the Marco Polo Syndrome. What is monstrous about this syndrome is that it perceives whatever is different as life-threatening viruses rather than nutritional elements”* [6]. Rafal Niemojewski suggested a more intriguing question: Is the Havana Biennial, the first fully international, globally concerned, and discursively backed biennial launched in 1984, the true model? [7] An event whose initial mission was to be a platform for the “Third World” has resulted in a model of counter-narratives and experimentation for

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inclusivity of artistic practice into every human activity to hold art and life together.

The curatorial project intended for this event is reasonably universal in its content. There is a great emphasis in social inclusion, potential contributions of art to social development, and integrating knowledge and taste to open new dimensions of the human intellectual activity. Critical challenges are evident: *i-*) there will not be a major exhibition centre, *ii-*) artworks will be harmonically integrated into City's space, *iii-*) there will be immaterial pieces and *iv-*) articulating and implementing this vision will be extremely difficult. Havana University, Academy of Fine Art "San Alejandro", National School of Art, High Institute of Art, Havana's research institutions, architects, and prestigious artists have worked as a task force to select spaces and artworks. Pieces in exhibition will not be classic, but works in process by multidisciplinary teams. It is expected that viewers' understanding and appraisal of contemporary art will increase after direct interaction with artists and artworks located in selected places of Havana City. This perspective will serve to keep a continue change on the conception, strategy, and practice of Biennials at global scale.

Many will be reasonably unfamiliar with the *in situ* style of production and exhibition, multicultural exchange, and artistic practice for social inclusion, but this apparently confusing mixture of ideas and hopes has a relevant historical precedent. The exhibition "Magiciens de la terre", (Pompidou and La Villette, Paris, May 18th–August 14th, 1989) inaugurated before the "Third Havana Biennial" (National Museum of Fine Art, Havana, November 1st – December 31st, 1989), authenticated a new age in the conception of this type of events. By that time, artists from Asia, Africa and Latin America were invited

to show their works in a new type of Biennial that included European artists. This intelligent reaction was unfortunately undermined in part by Buchloh, who remarked: "*this will be the first truly international exhibition of worldwide contemporary art*" [8].

Certainly, many things have changed in major art circuits from the first Havana Biennial. The current scope of this event points to a wide vision on art as a force in favour of human improvement, and society transformation. At present, artists should be more concerned on a wider range of viewers, subjects, significance of their work, and interactions with other fields of knowledge and social issues. The times of static rules of art appraisal seem to be gone with the intervention of the collective taste and memory as an influential factor. Finally, careful attention should be paid to Havana Biennial 2015, since the next revolution in the aesthetic thought could be nearer than expected.

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