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# Biennialization? What biennialization? The documentation of biennials and other recurrent exhibitions

*Gustavo Grandal Montero*

**B**iennials have been central to the development of contemporary art for decades, but there is a paucity of published material specifically related to this subject. Documentation for these important exhibitions is not always made available and it is often difficult to acquire, posing an obstacle to current and future research across a number of areas within contemporary art, curating and art history. This article offers an overview of major current biennials and of the different sources of information they produce (catalogues, other printed material, online resources, archives), and surveys the secondary literature of the phenomenon. It also discusses specific collection development issues in libraries, from a research perspective, proposing a set of recommendations for best practice.

*The biennial exhibition ... has arguably ... proved to be 'the' medium through which most contemporary art comes to be known.<sup>1</sup>*

*There seems to be no single publication devoted solely to the subject of large-scale international exhibitions.<sup>2</sup>*

There are currently more than a hundred biennial and other recurrent exhibitions<sup>3</sup> of contemporary art, with 30 to 40 taking place each year (almost one every ten days, on average). The oldest, Venice Biennale, was first held in 1895. São Paulo followed in 1951, and a few more during the next three decades, the majority in Europe (Documenta in 1955, Paris in 1959, etc.), taking the total number to around 20 by the mid-1980s, when a process of proliferation that would accelerate and become known as 'Biennialization' during the 1990s, started to take place. Havana and three other new biennials were launched in 1984, and by the mid-1990s more than 60 were in existence, mostly in cities and in all five continents. Overall numbers have stayed above one hundred for the last decade and are still rising (to 110 in 2011, see the list of current biennials on p.19-21), with newly created events vastly outnumbering discontinued ones.<sup>4</sup>

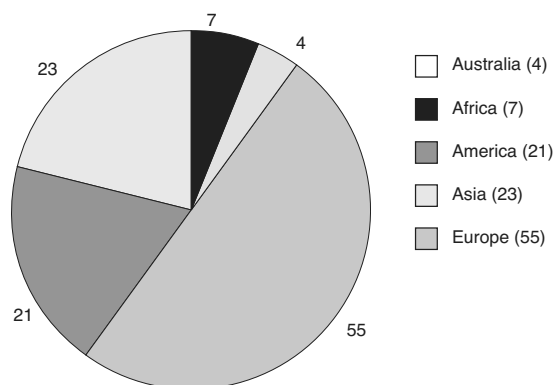
This extraordinary proliferation of major recurrent international exhibitions is one of the most significant developments in contemporary art in the last two decades, and is closely related to the major changes in politics, economics and the wider culture often described as 'globalisation'. However, the success and long history of the format are also a consequence of its versatility, resilience and high degree of popularity. In addition to being large-scale international surveys, biennials are defined by their recurrence (biennial literally meaning 'occurring every two years'). Triennials, quadrennials and quinquennials are also held, with Skulptur Projekte Münster, every 10 years, currently having the longest cycle. Annual exhibitions are not part of this phenomenon, and neither are art fairs.<sup>5</sup>

Created by local and central governments, businesses and entrepreneurs, cultural and not-for-profit organisations, or combinations of these, biennials respond to different interests and contexts, and can present very different characteristics, subject to change over time. Venice Biennale<sup>6</sup> was created by the Venetian local government, a year before the first modern Olympic Games, on a model that borrowed heavily from that of the world fairs, or international exhibitions, of the second half of the

19th century. International relations and politics had a primary role, through the use of the diplomatic invitation to participate, a system that would be repeated in other early biennials like São Paulo, Cairo or Delhi, but would later be abandoned in favour of curatorial selection. This is the biennial as a local and national showcase, and also as a way of connecting with and developing international artistic, cultural and economic networks. The management of Venice Biennale was taken over by the Fascist state in 1930, but since then government involvement has gradually decreased, and it is now an independent foundation.

With combined visitor figures of many millions, biennials are often seen as spectacular events that mix art and education with entertainment, part of the cultural industries of late capitalism, and closely related to mass tourism. Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, who presided over the expansion of the Biennale during the 1930s, including the creation of the Venice Film Festival, was also president of the 'Italian Company of Grand Hotels' (CIGA) and developer of the Lido, where the Film Festival is still held. Many biennials are created as a way for cities and even countries to develop their cultural assets and to integrate themselves into the cultural tourism networks. Their dual positioning within the cultural and economic systems mirrors and highlights that of contemporary art at large, as does the expansion of recent decades. The economic role of art goes well beyond the significance of the art market (itself ever larger), including areas like urban development, industrial renovation and many others, in a context of high public and mass media interest, creation of new museums and galleries, rising visitor numbers to exhibitions, growing academic and professional provision and output, etc.

#### Current biennials by region

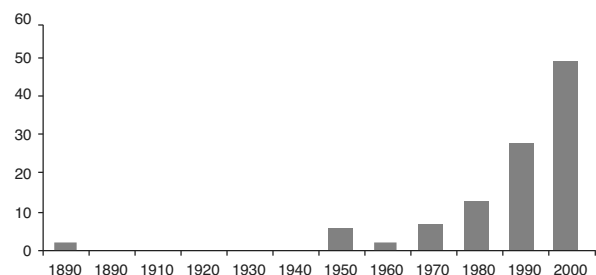


The majority of biennials are located in Europe (55), but this is a truly international phenomenon, with Asia (23) and the Americas (21) particularly

well represented. In total, 51 countries currently host one or more of these events. Asia is the region of greatest growth, and also investment, with numerous examples of high-profile new biennials created since the mid-1990s (Gwangju, Shanghai, Busan, Guangzhou, Beijing, Singapore), following wider economic and political changes. With very few exceptions, biennials are held in cities, with certain countries and/or regions benefiting from a possible multiplication effect.<sup>7</sup> The biennial is historically and culturally a western format and it is often debated whether it can adopt or serve non-western perspectives. Participation by non-occidental artists and curators has steadily increased, originally via new 'peripheral' biennials (São Paulo, Cairo, Havana, Istanbul, Dakar, Gwangju, etc.), more recently as all biennials have become 'global exhibitions', reflecting cultural and economic globalisation, and focusing on and questioning globalisation itself as an idea, in contexts including post-colonialism and identity politics.

Given the differences in development factors and agendas (political, economic, ideological and cultural), biennials are enormously varied in size, aims and ambitions, funding, structure, numbers of visitors, publicity, etc., and certainly not all of them are of historical significance, although they would be of interest as part of the larger phenomenon, which is sometimes referred to as 'biennial culture'. In addition to the major international contemporary art surveys that are the focus of this article, there are a number of associated sub-types. These can be defined, for instance, by a genre or medium specialism (print – very popular between the 1960s and 1980s, film and video art, public art, electronic art, etc.), or a geographical focus (regional: Baltic, Mediterranean, Caribbean, Asia-Pacific; geopolitical: 'Third World', European Union; national; local; etc.)

#### New biennials (current only) by date



The biennial institution has joined, some would argue replaced, the museum to occupy a central space in the expanding contemporary art system, influencing its development both in relation to its

production and its distribution. This can be seen, for instance, in the prevalence of ephemeral, conceptual and site-specific artwork, and the popularity of formats like installation and video, but also in the development of new professional networks and unprecedented mobility, and the rise of the role of curator.

As early as 1910, F.T. Marinetti distributed anti-Biennale leaflets in St Mark's Square (sadly not in the ephemera collection of the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee! – see p. 16). In recent years, the form and function of the biennial has come under sustained criticism, and a number of significant events have been discontinued (Johannesburg, Melbourne, Valencia, etc.).<sup>8</sup> Although data seem to suggest a small deceleration in the creation of new biennials (three in both 2009 and 2010), it is too early to confirm this as a trend, let alone to declare the extraordinary proliferation of the last two decades over, while the rate of discontinuation appears to remain stable. More significant are perhaps conceptual critiques of the model, seen by some as 'in crisis', issues in its relationship with local art systems, or renewed competition from art fairs. At its best, however, the biennial has an experimental, self-reflexive and questioning character, both in terms of its form and its content, and this makes it a privileged vehicle for presenting contemporary art in the first decades of the 21st century.

## Documentation

Carlos Basualdo was in despair in 2002 about the lack of literature devoted to the biennial phenomenon. In the same essay, he also wrote,

In comparison with the rivers of ink these shows unleash in both the specialised press and the mass media, the academic critical literature specifically tackling these events is relatively scarce: barely a dozen books, in two or three languages, published largely in the last decade.<sup>9</sup>

This paucity of published material does not only apply to secondary materials, as primary sources (exhibition catalogues, pamphlets, guides, etc.) are not always available, and many are of an ephemeral nature, including online resources; this poses a substantial obstacle to current and future research across a number of areas within contemporary art, curating and art history.

In addition to reviews and reports in newspapers and magazines, and in specialist art journals,

exhibition catalogues are the main source of information for these events, and the most authoritative. A catalogue in print was available for the latest edition of 77 (70%) of the list of 110 current biennials, while for 33 (30%) it was not.<sup>10</sup> These figures seem to correspond with the situation elsewhere in contemporary art, with substantial print catalogues being published as the main source of documentation for exhibitions in established and/or larger public and commercial galleries, as has been traditional since the first half of the 20th century and earlier (for instance, Venice Biennale has published catalogues for all its editions since 1895), but not always by smaller ones or those with limited resources, particularly in recent years. In addition to catalogues, biennials will from time to time publish other substantial monographs, sometimes in partnership with commercial or other publishers, (artists' books, historical or theoretical works, sourcebooks, etc.) and, on a few occasions, periodicals (*Manifesta journal*, *La Biennale de Venezia*, etc.).

The range of other print materials produced varies substantially between different events, but handbooks, programmes, guides, maps and plans, posters, press releases and announcements, listings, invites, leaflets, flyers, cards and stickers are among the most usual types of ephemera, often containing much information not available elsewhere, for instance of fringe or artist-run activities, and rich as visual sources (photography, logos, typography, etc.). For obvious reasons, this material is particularly important for those biennials where no catalogue is published.

Online sources in the form of multimedia websites are available for all 110 events, often including podcasts and videocasts, and digital versions (usually pdf files) of catalogues, programmes and press releases. Flickr (images), YouTube (video) or Vimeo (video) channels are also common, as are social media (Facebook, etc.) and mobile device applications (or 'apps'). Some of this content is created specifically for the web, like blogs, including curators' blogs (see, for instance, the very interesting blog of the curatorial team of the 8th Mercosul Biennial at <http://bienalmercosul.art.br/blog>). As with other internet resources, long term access is problematic, with content for previous editions often not being maintained after the event.

Archival material (institutional records, accounts, correspondence, proposals, original video and photography, etc., both in physical and digital formats) is usually kept in personal (artists', curators') or institutional archives, as part of the biennial management office or in more formal

settings. Only a small proportion of all biennials have been able to establish archives that are open to researchers in suitable conditions and/or run by specialist professional staff, making discovery and access, and long-term preservation, matters of concern for the future, particularly in the case of discontinued events.

A number of international documentation centres specialise in these materials, including the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC) (see below), the Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo (AHWS),<sup>11</sup> Documenta Archiv,<sup>12</sup> and the Asia Art Archive (AAA).<sup>13</sup> Other major contemporary art libraries with significant holdings of biennial publications include the British Council Visual Arts Library in London,<sup>14</sup> and MoMA Library in New York.

As discussed above, academic and professional literature has been slow to develop despite increasing scholarly interest in the subject and, with almost no exceptions, these publications have appeared since 1995, when new historical and critical writing was commissioned and produced as part of the Venice Biennale centenary. The recently published *Biennial reader*<sup>15</sup> is an excellent introduction to current debates and to the main references and authors, many of whom are curators, artists, critics, etc. directly involved with the biennial industry. This may reflect, in part, the difficulty for mainstream art historians and others in accessing source materials, and could present issues of perspective.

The *Biennial reader* includes a useful, but not comprehensive, bibliography. Until one appears, it can be complemented by those in *The Manifesta decade: debates on contemporary art exhibitions and biennials in post-wall Europe*,<sup>16</sup> *The art biennial as a global phenomenon: strategies in neo-political times*,<sup>17</sup> and *Biennials: art on a global scale*.<sup>18</sup>

### Producing and making documentation accessible: the cases of Venice Biennale and Athens Biennial

The ARLIS/UK & Ireland Travel & Study Award funded a research trip to Venice and Athens in late June 2011 to investigate the documentation of biennials. A full report is available: *ARLIS/UK & Ireland Travel & Study Award 2010: report on a research trip to Venice and Athens, 20th -28th June 2011* (2011).<sup>19</sup>

#### *Venice Biennale*

The focus of the visit to Venice, coinciding with the 54th edition of the Biennale, was to learn about the

collections and activities of the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC), to investigate and collect documentation *in situ* (printed ephemera particularly) from a range of exhibitions, including fringe or artist-run activities, and to survey and compare historical and official records, printed publications, and other forms of documentation (including online), in the context of a long-established, well documented and structured biennial.

Established in 1928, ASAC holds documentation of the Biennale since its creation, and a large specialist collection of ca. 130,000 monographs and catalogues, 3000 periodical titles, 16,000 AV items, photographs, posters, press cuttings and other ephemera, and artworks, on modern and contemporary art, architecture, film, music, dance, and theatre.

Historical material is deposited by the different Biennale sections (Visual Arts, Film, etc.) In addition to this, donations and exchanges are currently the main source of acquisitions. ASAC is managed by a Biennale Sector Director and is staffed by a small team of professional librarians and others.

The ASAC Archive, a repository for historical and non-book collections, has been housed since 2008 in modern facilities in a technology park in Porto Marghera, open to researchers only. A print catalogue of Biennale historical material (*Indice dei fondi e delle serie*, 2009) is available.

ASAC has digitised and made available online on *ASAC Dati* a large number of items from selected collections (posters, photographs, etc.) *ASAC Dati* also provides comprehensive listings and information about previous Biennale exhibitions and events.

Opened in 2009 in new premises within the Padiglione Centrale, the ASAC Library holds the monographs, catalogues and periodicals collected since the 1920s on the subjects covered by the different sections of the Biennale. It includes ASAC and Biennale publications, and the most comprehensive selection of historical material related to biennials anywhere in the world. A proportion of the collection has been catalogued since the 1990s (sadly, not including at present most of the biennial and other exhibition catalogues), and these can be consulted online as part of the Polo Venezia of the Italian national SBN catalogue (<http://polovea.sebina.it/SebinaOpac/Opac>). The library is open to exhibition visitors, researchers, students and the general public.<sup>20</sup>

*Athens Biennial*

The purpose of the Athens leg of the research trip was to visit the Athens Biennial headquarters (a young, independent organisation, at the time busy preparing its 3rd edition) and its archive, as a case study presenting very different characteristics to those of Venice.

Founded in late 2005 by curatorial collective XYZ (Xenia Kalpaktsoglou, Poka-Yio and Augustine Zenakos) the 1st Athens Biennial 'Destroy Athens' was held in 2007, followed by 'Heaven' in 2009, with a 3rd edition to open in October 2011. The Biennial has an ambitious publications strategy, producing a range of critical or theoretical titles (in English and Greek) that complement directly or indirectly the exhibition catalogues, often in partnership with commercial publishers (*Suggestions for the destruction of Athens: a handbook; Prayer for (passive?) resistance;* etc.) It also makes content available online via its website, a YouTube channel, and has produced mobile device apps.

Its in-house archive contains portfolios, proposals or documentation of works, CVs, correspondence and other material from artists and others accumulated in the course of the Biennial business, most of it in digital format. There is also a small library of exhibition catalogues and monographs received from other biennials, and also museums, galleries and institutions, primarily for use by Biennial staff (although they receive visitors including curators, researchers and students). The material is partially listed and looked after by a member of the curatorial team.<sup>21</sup>

## Collection development

As numerous postings on art librarians' email lists attest, collecting biennial related material at a research level presents a number of challenges. The focus in this section will be primarily on exhibition catalogues, but will also include other print material. Before tackling practicalities, it is important that the reason for collecting this type of material is identified, and that collecting remit and scope are defined. This information should be part of the library's collection development policy, not only to adhere to best practice, but also to guide acquisitions staff in their work in this area, and to better inform users and their expectations of the service.

Whether the collecting scope is comprehensive or selective (for instance, on a geographical basis, according to medium, etc.), awareness and selection are difficult and time-consuming, as information is not always readily available. Coverage by

bibliographic data suppliers and alert systems is limited, and other sources are partial and multiple (art magazines, Biennial Foundation and other biennial websites, art event listings, etc.).

Library suppliers are only able to provide a relatively limited coverage via standing orders and/or approval plans, in principle the best way of dealing with serial material of this kind. Art specialists (e.g. Arts Bibliographic, UK, <http://www.artsbib.com>; Worldwide, USA, <http://www.worldwide-artbooks.com>; or Shamansky, USA, <http://www.artbooks.com>), language/country specialists (e.g. Casalini, Italy, <http://www.casalini.it>), and generalist suppliers (Bertrams, Blackwell, Coutts, Dawson, YBP, etc.) are able, in combination, to supply an estimated 30-50% of current biennial catalogues in this way (although this percentage can be higher for supplying material identified and ordered directly by a library).

A significant way of acquiring the catalogues of biennials is via publication exchanges, particularly for museum or other libraries associated with a programme of contemporary art publications. This is a relatively time-consuming method, but well suited to this type of material and sometimes more successful than direct acquisition. Direct purchases, finally, are the last-resort method to acquire this material, either by post or in person (as part of visits to the biennial by members of staff – curators in museum libraries, researchers and lecturers in academic libraries, librarians anywhere). Donations can also be very helpful to fill gaps in the collection, both for current and retrospective collection development.

Acquiring other print documentation is nearly always only possible via direct visits, although the rarity and richness of this ephemeral material does justify the trouble (as anyone who has spent time at Venice's central post office navigating the vagaries of the international mail system I am sure would agree).

At Chelsea College of Art & Design Library, a medium-sized specialist academic library that is part of University of the Arts London (UAL), 43 current biennials (of 77, or 56% of all published) are collected, of which 13 titles (17%) are received via standing order with an art specialist supplier, and the rest acquired via an approval plan from a language specialist supplier, as firm orders from a generalist library supplier or directly from the publishers, or donated by staff and students. In addition, 21 discontinued titles are also represented in the collection, in most cases with significant holdings. The library also collects contemporary art ephemera, including some material from selected

UK and major international biennials.<sup>22</sup>

Cataloguing biennial catalogues (or other publications) is fairly familiar territory for anyone who has experience of this type of work in an art library. At Chelsea College of Art & Design Library and the other libraries of UAL, local guidelines for cataloguing exhibition catalogues have been produced to achieve maximum consistency in the application to these materials of the international standards AACR2, MARC21, DDC and LCSH.<sup>23</sup>

Good selection of access points and subject indexing are important elements in creating catalogue records that facilitate access and use of biennial catalogue collections. Consistent use of field 111 Main entry – Meeting name (format: meeting name, number, date, place – if not part of the meeting name) and 611 Subject added entry – Meeting name (event name only), are both essential to this.

Due to the international and multilingual nature of this material, there are a number of language related cataloguing issues. Both ‘biennial’ and ‘biennale’ (an Italian word, but widely used in English to refer to biennial exhibitions) should be used somewhere in the catalogue record, to maximise keyword retrieval. For the same reason, use of anglicised as well as vernacular forms of the name of the biennial, individual edition title (or subtitle, parallel title, alternative title, etc.) and location name is recommended in all cases, using note fields (5XX) when necessary. Creating parallel, alternative, etc. title field (246) entries when appropriate for these, will also improve left-anchored title search retrieval. Libraries collecting Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian, Arabic or other non-Roman script language material, and with significant use by speakers of these languages, may consider the creation of multiscript MARC21 records<sup>24</sup> to allow direct search and retrieval in the original script.

For reasons including long-term preservation of primary research material, and to maximise access at short notice to scarce resources, biennial and other exhibition catalogues in the collection at Chelsea are for reference use only in the library. Location and access are fundamentally local decisions, but the balance between protecting rare and valuable titles and facilitating access for all users should be carefully considered.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Biennials have been central to the production and distribution of contemporary art for decades, but

### Catalogue record for ‘Illuminations’ exhibition catalogue

000 01167cam a2200277 a 4500  
001 448576  
005 20110714142106.0  
008 110714s2011 it a b 001 0 d eng d  
020 \_\_ |a 978883170820 (pbk.)  
040 \_\_ |a StDuBDS |b eng |c StDuBDS |d UK-LoUA  
082 04 |a 709.050744531 |2 22  
111 2\_ |a Biennale di Venezia. |n (54th : |d 2011 : |c Venice, Italy)  
245 10 |a Illuminations : |b [54th international art exhibition] : la biennale di Venezia / |c [catalogue edited by Bice Curiger and Giovanni Carmine].  
246 35 |a 54th international art exhibition  
246 32 |a Biennale di Venezia : |b 54 Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte  
246 3\_ |a Illuminations  
246 \_\_ |a Venice Biennial  
246 38 |a Biennale arte 2011  
260 \_\_ |a [Venezia] : |b Marsilio, |c c2011.  
300 \_\_ |a 599 p. : |b ill. (chiefly col.) ; |c 26 cm. + |e 1 poster (folded).  
500 \_\_ |a With accompanying fold-out colour poster titled ‘The making of Biennale Arte 2011’.  
504 \_\_ |a Includes bibliographical references and index.  
611 20 |a Biennale di Venezia.  
650 \_0 |a Art, Modern |y 20th century |v Exhibitions.  
650 \_0 |a Art, Modern |y 21st century |v Exhibitions.  
700 1\_ |a Curiger, Bice, |d 1948-  
700 1\_ |a Carmine, Giovanni.

their documentation is often not available to, or collected by, art libraries. Biennial catalogues, and other publications, should be identified by these as high priority material, and included as such in collection development policies for libraries with research level collections in contemporary art. A degree of co-ordination in library acquisitions work in this area should be investigated to improve overall coverage, either as a formal arrangement (for instance, through ARLIS/ UK & Ireland’s Committee for the National Co-ordination of Art Library Resources), or informally (for instance, at local level between London libraries collecting this type of material: British Council Visual Arts Library,

Tate Library, UAL, Iniva, etc., based on their individual priorities). The exchange of information and materials between UK libraries and international research centres/collections in this field (ASAC, AHWS, Documenta Archiv, AAA) should be advocated and facilitated by ARLIS/UK & Ireland and/or other appropriate bodies. Partnerships between libraries and researchers, research centres (e.g. Royal College of Art) and others active in this area (e.g. Biennial Foundation) should be explored, particularly regarding bibliographies and current and discontinued event information. Finally, private and institutional biennial archives should be identified and listed, and support structures that would allow long-term access to researchers investigated, as



Venice, June 2011.

Photo: Gustavo Grandal Montero.

should provisions to protect the archives of discontinued events.

### Current biennials by date of creation<sup>25</sup>

- Venice Biennale (Italy) 1895 <http://www.labiennale.org/en/Home.html>  
 São Paulo Biennial (Brazil) 1951 <http://www.bienal.org.br>  
 Alexandria Biennale (Egypt) 1955 <http://www.alexbiennale.gov.eg>  
 Documenta (Germany) 1955 <http://www.documenta12.de>  
 Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts (Slovenia) 1955 <http://www.mglc-lj.si/eng/index-bienale.htm>  
 International Sculpture Biennale of Carrara (Italy) 1957 <http://www.labiennaledicarrara.it>  
 Biennale de Paris (France) 1959 <http://www.biennaledeparis.org>  
 Pontevedra Art Biennial (Spain) 1969 <http://www.bienal.depo.es>  
 Sonsbeek (Netherlands) 1971 <http://www.sonsbeek2008.nl>  
 Sculpture Quadrennial Riga (Latvia) 1972 <http://www.mmic.lv/en/sculpture-quadriennial>  
 Sydney Biennial (Australia) 1973 <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au>  
 Whitney Biennial (United States) 1973 [1932] <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2010Biennial>  
 Skulptur Projekte Münster (Germany) 1977 <http://www.skulptur-projekte.de>  
 Biennial of Cerveira (Portugal) 1978 <http://www.bienaldecerveira.pt>  
 Baltic Triennial of International Art (Lithuania) 1979 <http://www.cac.lt/en/exhibitions/triennial>  
 Triennale Fellbach (Germany) 1980 <http://www.triennale.de/triennale.php>  
 Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh 1981 <http://www.bangladeshbiennale.org>  
 Carnegie International (United States) 1982 [1896] [http://web.cmoa.org/?page\\_id=51](http://web.cmoa.org/?page_id=51)  
 Biennale of Montréal (Canada) 1983 <http://biennalemontreal.org/en>  
 Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean (BJCEM) (Italy) 1984 <http://www.bjcem.org>  
 Cairo Biennale (Egypt) 1984 <http://www.cairobiennale.gov.eg>  
 California Biennial (United States) 1984 <http://www.ocma.net>  
 Havana Biennale (Cuba) 1984 <http://www.bienalhabana.cult.cu>  
 Videonale (Germany) 1984 <http://www.videonale.org/en>  
 International Biennial of Cuenca (Ecuador) 1985 <http://www.bienaldecuenca.org>  
 Rauma Biennale Balticum (Finland) 1985 [http://www.raumantaidemuseo.fi/rbb10/rbb10\\_eng.htm](http://www.raumantaidemuseo.fi/rbb10/rbb10_eng.htm)  
 Istanbul Biennial (Turkey) 1987 <http://bienal.iksv.org/en>  
 WRO Media Art Biennale (Poland) 1989 <http://www.wrocenter.pl/en/biennale-wro>



Ars Baltica Triennial of Photographic Art (Germany) 1991 <http://www.ars-baltica.net>  
 Kitakyushu Biennial (Japan) 1991 <http://artonline.jp>  
 Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art (France) 1991 <http://www.biennale-de-lyon.org>  
 Dak'Art: the Biennial of Contemporary African Art (Senegal) 1992 <http://www.dakart.org>  
 International Print Triennial in Krakow (Poland) 1992 <http://www.triennial.cracow.pl>  
 Panama Biennial (Panama) 1992 <http://www.bienalpanama.org>  
 Taipei Biennial (Taiwan) 1992 <http://www.taipeibiennial.org>  
 Asia – Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Australia) 1993 <http://qag.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/apt>  
 Curitiba Biennial (Brazil) 1993 <http://www.bienaldecuitiba.com.br>  
 Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates) 1993 <http://www.sharjahbiennial.org>  
 Pittsburgh Biennial (United States) 1994 <http://biennial.pittsburgharts.org>  
 Rencontres de Bamako, Biennale Africaine de la Photographie (Mali) 1994 <http://rencontres-bamako.com>  
 Baltic Contemporary Art Biennale (Poland) 1995 <http://www.marearticum.pl/biennale>  
 Gwangju Biennale (South Korea) 1995 <http://www.gb.or.kr>  
 Site Santa Fe International Biennial (United States) 1995 <http://www.sitesantafe.org>  
 Manifesta, European Biennial of Contemporary Art (Netherlands) 1996 <http://www.manifesta.org>  
 Mercosul Biennial (Brazil) 1996 <http://www.bienalmercosul.art.br>  
 Shanghai Biennale (China) 1996 <http://www.shanghaiennale.com>  
 Florence Biennale (Italy) 1997 <http://www.florencebiennale.org>  
 Gyumri International Biennial of Contemporary Art (Armenia) 1997 <http://www.gyumriennial.org>  
 Periferic (Romania) 1997 <http://www.periferic.org>  
 Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (Germany) 1998 <http://www.berlinbiennale.de>  
 Busan Biennale (South Korea) 1998 <http://www.busanbiennale.org>  
 Liverpool Biennial (United Kingdom) 1998 <http://www.biennial.com>  
 Nordic Biennial Momentum (Norway) 1998 <http://www.momentum.no>  
 Triennale Oberschwaben (Germany) 1998 <http://media.region-fn.de/triennale/web-content/index.html>  
 Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale (Japan) 1999 <http://faam.city.fukuoka.lg.jp>  
 Live Performance Art Biennial (Canada) 1999 <http://www.livebiennale.ca>  
 Echigo Tsumari Art Triennial (Japan) 2000 <http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp>  
 Greater New York (United States) 2000 <http://www.ps1.org/exhibitions/view/310>  
 Scape Biennial (New Zealand) 2000 <http://www.scapebiennial.org.nz>  
 Seoul International Media Art Biennale (South Korea) 2000 <http://www.mediacityseoul.org>  
 Tate Triennial (United Kingdom) 2000 <http://www.tate.org.uk>  
 Auckland Triennial (New Zealand) 2001 <http://www.aucklandtriennial.com>  
 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (Sweden) 2001 <http://www.biennial.goteborg.se>  
 Tirana Biennial (Albania) 2001 <http://tica-albania.org/TICAB>  
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 Guangzhou Triennial (China) 2002 <http://www.gztriennial.org>  
 Manifestation internationale d'art de Québec-Manif d'art (Canada) 2002 <http://www.manifdart.org>  
 Whitstable Biennial (United Kingdom) 2002 <http://www.whitstablebiennale.com>  
 Beaufort Triennial of Contemporary Art by the Sea (Belgium) 2003 <http://www.beaufort04.be/en>  
 Beijing International Art Biennale (China) 2003 <http://www.bjbiennale.com.cn>  
 BIACS – International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville (Spain) 2003 <http://www.fundacionbiacs.com>  
 Brighton Photo Biennial (United Kingdom) 2003 <http://www.bpb.org.uk>  
 Cape (South Africa) 2003 <http://www.capeafrica.org>  
 Contour Biennial for Video Art (Belgium) 2003 <http://www.contour2011.be/en>  
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 San Juan Poly/Graphic Triennial (Puerto Rico) 2004 <http://www.trienalsanjuan.org>  
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 Arts in Marrakech International Biennale (Morocco) 2005 <http://www.marrakechbiennale.org>  
 Athens Biennial (Greece) 2005 <http://www.athensbiennial.org/AB/en/ENintro.htm>  
 Bucharest Biennale (Romania) 2005 <http://www.bucharestbiennale.org>

ITCA – International Triennale of Contemporary Art (Czech Republic) 2005 <http://www.ngprague.cz/itca>  
 Moscow Biennale (Russia) 2005 <http://4th.moscowbiennale.ru/en>  
 Riwaq Biennial (Palestine) 2005 <http://www.riwaq.org>  
 Architecture, Art and Landscape Biennial of the Canaries (Spain) 2006 <http://www.bienaldecanarias.org>  
 Arts: Le Havre (France) 2006 <http://www.artslehavre.com>  
 Luanda Triennial (Angola) 2006 <http://www.sindikadokolocollection.org>  
 Singapore Biennale (Singapore) 2006 <http://www.singaporebiennale.org>  
 Sinopale, International Sinop Biennial (Turkey) 2006 <http://sinopale.org>  
 Turin Triennial (Italy) 2006 <http://www.torinotriennale.it>  
 Asian Art Biennial (Taiwan) 2007 <http://www.asianartbiennial.org>  
 Antakya Biennial (Turkey) 2007 <http://www.antakyabiennial.org>  
 Biennial at the End of the World (Argentina) 2007 <http://www.bienalfindelmundo.blogspot.com>  
 Herzliya Biennial (Israel) 2007 <http://www.herzliya-biennial.com>  
 Prospect New Orleans (United States) 2007 <http://www.prospectneworleans.org>  
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  2. Carlos Basualdo, 'The unstable institution,' *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003/Spring 2004): Biennials, 51n.
  3. I will use 'biennial' in this article as including all recurrent or perennial contemporary art exhibitions except those held annually (e.g. triennials, quadrennials, quinquennials, etc.).
  4. The top years for new biennials (current only) are: 2003 (7); 2005 (6); 1984, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2007 (5); 1992, 2001, 2008 (4).
  5. Although still firmly positioned in the commercial world, the rise over the last few years of 'curated' art fairs (Art Basel, Frieze, etc.) has led some critics and curators to argue that both formats have become identical and, in some cases, that these new fairs are the replacement for an obsolete biennial model (see, for instance, the interesting Paco Barragan, *The art fair age* (Milan: Charta, 2008)).
  6. For a historical overview of the development of the most significant biennials, see Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials: art on a global scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2010).
  7. The countries with the largest number of current biennials are: USA (9); Germany (8); UK (6); Italy, Japan, Poland (5); China, France, South Korea (4).
  8. Dozens of biennials have been discontinued over time, e.g. Tokyo (1952-1990). It is sometimes difficult to identify discontinued events as such, as delays or breaks in the expected sequence are relatively common, and up-to-date information is not always available. Triennale India (est. 1968), for instance, has not been held since 2005, but is still listed as current in most directories. Changes in periodicity are also known, e.g. triennial to biennial. Finally, long periods of inactivity, e.g. Sonsbeek 1971-1986, or Paris 1985-2004, make for intermittent histories.
- Due to lack of information, it is difficult to establish discontinuation rates. Using partial data for 30 discontinued events, 12 had been created in the 1990s (40 per cent) and another 12 in the 2000s (40 per cent). Since some 40 new biennials were created 1990-99, the discontinuation rate

- would be 30 per cent; 2000-10 saw 61 new ones, with a lower discontinuation rate of 20 per cent. Eight only celebrated one edition (26 per cent).
9. Basualdo, 'The unstable institution,' 51.
  10. These figures may not be completely accurate, as it is possible that in some cases a catalogue has been published for which I could not find out details, but should be indicative.
  11. See the São Paulo Biennial website for more information: <http://www.bienal.org.br/FBSP/pt/AHWS/Paginas/default.aspx>. As part of the project 'Bienais do mundo' for the 2008 edition of the Biennial, the AHWS acquired some 650 biennial catalogues to add to its collection, which was made available in a reading room open to visitors. Now comprising material from 200 biennials, it was showcased during the 2009 Bergen Biennial Conference (<http://www.bbc2009.no/default.asp?k=21&id=101>).
  12. See the Documenta Archiv website for more information: [http://documentaarchiv.stadt-kassel.de/miniwebs/documentaarchiv\\_e](http://documentaarchiv.stadt-kassel.de/miniwebs/documentaarchiv_e).
  13. The Asia Art Archive is a pioneering institution based in Hong Kong dedicated to the documentation of contemporary art in the Asian region, and its collection has an emphasis on biennials. See its website for more information: <http://www.aaa.org.hk/home.aspx>.
  14. The British Council is responsible for the British Pavilion at Venice and it was also involved with the UK representation at São Paulo. The British Council Visual Arts Library is an important collection for post-1945 British art and includes rich holdings relating to Venice, São Paulo and other biennials. More information, and its online catalogue, is available at [www.britishcouncil.org/arts-art-architecture-design-library.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-art-architecture-design-library.htm). See also Sophie Bowness and Clive Phillpot, *Britain at the Venice Biennale, 1895-1995* (London: British Council, 1995), and *Britain and the São Paulo Bienal 1951-1991* (São Paulo: British Council, 1991).
  15. Filipovic, van Hal and Øvstebø, *The biennial reader*. See reference 1, above.
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  21. For more information visit the Athens Biennial website at <http://www.athensbiennial.org/AB/en/Enintro>.  
See also *Suggestions for the destruction of Athens: a handbook* (Athens: Athens Biennial, 2007); *Prayer for (passive?) resistance* (Athens: Futura Publications, 2007); *1st Athens Biennial 2007: destroy Athens* (Athens: Athens Biennial, 2007); *Destroy Athens: a narrative* (Athens: Athens Biennial, 2007); and *Heaven: 2nd Biennial Athens 2009* (Athens: Athens Biennial, 2009).
  22. For information about Chelsea's Ephemera Collection, and general information on art ephemera and artist files in libraries, see the ARLIS/NA online directory and best practice documents, *Artist files revealed* at <http://www.artistfilesrevealed.com/tiki/tiki-index.php>.
  23. For a more general introduction to cataloguing exhibition catalogues see: ARLIS/UK & Ireland Cataloguing and Classification Committee, *Art exhibition documentation in libraries: cataloguing guidelines* (London: ARLIS, 2000), and the ARLIS/NA Cataloging Advisory Committee online guidelines: *Cataloging exhibition publications: best practice. Title and statement of responsibility*, <http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cataloging.pdf>; *Cataloging exhibition publications: best practice. Notes*, [http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cat\\_exhib\\_pub.pdf](http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cat_exhib_pub.pdf); *Cataloging exhibition publications: best practice. Name and title access points*, <http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cepbp-ntap.pdf>; *Cataloging exhibition publications: best practice. Subject headings*, [http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cat\\_best\\_pract-subjects.pdf](http://www.arlisna.org/pubs/onlinepubs/cat_best_pract-subjects.pdf).
  24. For more information on Multiscript MARC21

records, see <http://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/ecbdmulti.html>.

25. This list has been compiled as a tool for collection development in libraries and it is not definitive. I have used the form of name of the event common in English language literature of the subject. Sources: Filipovic, van Hal and Øvstebø, *The biennial reader*; Vanderlinden and Filipovic, *The Manifesta decade*; Vogel, *Biennials*; Biennial Foundation, *Biennial map*, <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennial-map>; Asia Art Archive, *All you want to know about international art biennials*, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/onlineprojects/bitri/en/alpha.aspx>; AICA, *List of biennials websites*, <http://www.aica-int.org/spip.php?article464> and individual biennial websites.

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