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Biennalization? What biennalization?
The documentation of biennials and other recurrent exhibitions

Gustavo Grandal Montero

Biennials 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.

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.

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 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. 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.).

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.

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.

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), Documenta Archiv, and the Asia Art Archive (AAA). Other major contemporary art libraries with significant holdings of biennial publications include the British Council Visual Arts libraries with significant holdings of biennial publications in post-wall Europe decade: debates on contemporary art exhibitions and can be complemented by those in a comprehensive bibliography. Until one appears, it may reflect, in part, the difficulty for mainstream art historians and others in accessing source materials, and could present issues of perspective.

The Biennal 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, The art biennial as a global phenomenon: strategies in neo-political times, and Biennials: art on a global scale.

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

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).

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.
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.21

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...
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. 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 multiscrit MARC21 records 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 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.
Biennal 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
should provisions to protect the archives of
discontinued events.

Current biennials by date of creation

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.mglt-lj.si/eng/index-biennale.htm
International Sculpture Biennale of Carrara (Italy) 1957 http://www.labiennealedicarrara.it
Biennale de Paris (France)1959 http://www.biennaledeparis.org
Pontevedra Art Biennale (Spain) 1969 http://www.bienal.depo.es
Skulptur Projekte Münster (Germany) 1977 http://www.skulptur-projekte.de
Biennal 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
Biennale of Montréal (Canada) 1983 http://biennalemontréal.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.eu
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.raumantaaidemuseo.fi/rbb10/rbb10_eng.htm
Istanbul Biennial (Turkey) 1987 http://bienal.iksv.org/en
Ars Baltica Triennial of Photographic Art (Germany) 1991 http://www.ars-baltica.net
Kitakyushu Biennale (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.taipeiibiennial.org
Curitiba Biennial (Brazil) 1993 http://www.bienaldecoritiba.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
Mercosol Biennial (Brazil) 1996 http://www.bienalmercosul.art.br
Shanghai Biennale (China) 1996 http://www.shanghaibiennale.org
Florence Biennale (Italy) 1997 http://www.florencebiennale.org
Gyumri International Biennial of Contemporary Art (Armenia) 1997 http://www.gyumribiennial.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 Oberschwanen (Germany) 19998 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 Triennal (Japan) 2000 http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp
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
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.bpm.org.uk
Cape (South Africa) 2003 http://www.capeafrica.org
Prague Biennale (Czech Republic) 2003 http://www.praguebiennale.org
International Incheon Women Artists’ Biennale (South Korea) 2004 http://www.iwabiennale.org
Lodz Biennale (Poland) 2004 http://www.biennalelodz.pl
Performa (United States) 2004 http://11.performa-arts.org
San Juan Poly/Graphic Triennial (Puerto Rico) 2004 http://www.riyualsjuan.org
Arts in Marrakech International Biennale (Morocco) 2005 http://www.marrakechbiennale.org
Bucharest Biennale (Romania) 2005 http://www.bucharestbiennale.org
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.biennalfindelmundo.blogspot.com
Herzliya Biennial (Israel) 2007 http://www.herzliya-biennial.com
Prospect New Orleans (United States) 2007 http://www.prospectneworleans.org
Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (Greece) 2007 http://www.thessalonikibiennale.gr
Asia Triennial Manchester (United Kingdom) 2008 http://www.asiatriennialmanchester.com
Folkestone Triennial (United Kingdom) 2008 http://www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk
Mediations Biennale (Poland) 2008 http://www.mediations.pl
Chile Triennale (Chile) 2009 http://www.trienaldec Chile.cl
New Museum Triennial (United States) 2009 http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/411
Yayasan Biennale Yogyakarta (Indonesia) 2009 http://www.biennalejogja.org
Aichi Triennale (Japan) 2010 http://aichi triennale.jp/en
Biennale for International Light Art (Germany) 2010
Nanjing Biennale (China) 2010 http://www.nanjingbiennale.com
Dublin Contemporary (Ireland) 2011 http://www.dublincontemporary.com
Kochi-Muziris Biennale (India) 2011 http://www.kochimuzirisbiennale.org

References
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.).
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).


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.

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-information, and its online catalogue, is available at www.aaa.org.hk/home.aspx.


18. Vogel, Biennials.


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.


24. For more information on Multiscript MARC21...
records, see http://www.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/ecbdmulti.html.


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