

## Foreword

Vittorio Pajusco, Stefania Portinari

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

"After all, the biennial model itself is based on the impossible desire to concentrate the infinite worlds of contemporary art in a single place", wrote Massimiliano Gioni, curating the 55th Venice Biennale entitled *The Encyclopedic Palace*.<sup>1</sup> The 200 existing or supposed current biennials in the art world and this editorial series devoted to studying them are driven by the same unrealistic yet compelling ambition: that of embracing the infinite worlds of art, guided by a great fascination with the history of exhibitions and the desire to reconstruct specific ecosystems within contemporary art history.

Such a process allows for the comparison and critical reassessment of various historiographical interpretations of biennials, particularly considering transnational and postcolonial studies. It invites reflection on national identities (debating whether they still exist from an artistic perspective), and highlights the emergence of visual trends and artists viewed through a wide-angle, global lens. This undertaking amounts to a cartography of a utopia, an endless task that is perhaps even more mesmerizing because of its very impossibility.

*From Biennale to Biennials. Cartographies of an Impossible Desire* is the second volume for the *Atlante delle Biennali* (Atlas of Biennials) editorial series, part of the *Storie dell'arte contemporanea* (Histories of Contemporary Arts) collection from Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press. It explores the São Paulo Biennial as a dream that flourishes on the other side of the ocean and becomes a vital periodical large-scale exhibition, the essentiality of graphic art in Eastern European countries, transnational dialogues, snares and hopes, but also ghosts and apparitions, discords, and neo-colonialism. It is furthermore a space for reflection and dialogue on the biennial phenomenon, as well as the power and impact of the biennial as a model, concept, and political, cultural, and artistic tool.

As stated in the "Foreword" to the catalogue of the First International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice, when the Municipality of Venice established

---

**1** Gioni, M. (2013). *Is Everything in My Mind? The 55th International Art Exhibition, The Encyclopedic Palace = Exhibition Catalogue* (Venice, Gardens and Arsenale di Castello, 1 June-24 November 2013). Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 28.



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

**Storie dell'arte contemporanea 6 | Atlante delle Biennali 2**

e-ISSN 2724-136X | ISSN 2704-9973

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-910-8 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-912-2

Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2025-05-27 | Published 2025-07-24

© 2025 Pajusco, Portinari | © 4.0

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-910-8/000

to “open every biennium an Art Exhibition” (an idea that had arisen in the spring of 1893) an Advisory Commission was elected in the session of the City Council on 19 April 1894 to draft its regulation. This commission was composed partly by the Municipal Council and partly from an “assembly of Venetian artists”. This group unanimously voted that these exhibitions “should expand beyond the boundaries of Italian art”, not only because an “international exhibition should attract more public by the fame of illustrious foreigners who will compete in it, but also because it will bring to all intelligent people who are not able to undertake long journeys the way of knowing and comparing the most diverse aesthetic directions, and it will also enrich the intellectual patrimony of the young local artists who, by the works of their brothers from other nations, will feel themselves drawn to broader conceptions”.<sup>2</sup>

The Mayor of Venice, chairman of the Commission, then appealed to famous foreign artists to agree to serve on a Patronage Committee (which included, among others, Puvis de Chavannes, Gustave Moreau, Max Liebermann, Lawrence Alma Tadema, Edward Burne Jones, John Everett Millais, and Anders Zorn), who agreed with ‘warm cordiality’ to invite some international colleagues. This testifies to the organizers’ belief that “the name of Venice always arouses an ancient sentiment, a mixed feeling of inebriated admiration and almost domestic intimacy, in all spirits devoted to beauty, whatever language they speak and whatever country they belong to”. For this reason Venice “greeted with festivity the inauguration of the exhibition”, on that 30 April 1895, “wishing that the artists would find, thanks to the Biennale, excitement and comfort to create even greater works of art”, and that art itself “will unite the most excellent people of all countries in a bond of spiritual fraternity”: expressing from the beginning an exaggerated but beautiful desire for globality and sharing, which we now make our own with the hope that the editorial series *Atlante delle Biennali* will continue our academic amity and the studies we love.

---

**2** “Prefazione” (1895). *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte della Città di Venezia. 1895. Catalogo illustrato = Exhibition Catalogue* (Venice, Gardens of Castello, 30 April-9 November 1895). Venice: Premiata Stabilimento Tipolitografico Fratelli Visentini, 3-5 (authors’ transl.).