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7° EDITION - LISBOA 1994

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The Lisbon Biennial, in 1994, corresponded to a critical moment of an innovative project. In 1985, year of the first Biennial, there was no such thing as an initiative that dared to put together at the same time, in the same city, the artistic expressions which, since its inception, had marked the event-Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Image and New Media Arts, Applied Arts, Literature, Architecture.

Through this multidisciplinary approach, the Biennial motivated interdisciplinarity and became a pioneer of transdisciplinarity. It was at the vanguard of artistic projects that have marked the times in which we are living.

Beyond this model, the purpose of promoting a space of wide exposure for young artists revived the intentions of the no longer extant Paris Biennial, giving decisive strength to the creation and sedimentation of local, national, and European policies destined to support the beginning of careers.

Sometimes these incentives were corrupted with the creation of a category that seems to me to be artificial-the young artists, the young creators. In fact, "young art" does not exist as a category for evaluation but as a dynamic of processes in the artistic system, where the incentive for the beginning of a career has an important role, which in this kind of event reveals a high point but cannot reside, exclusively, in this way of acting.

The Biennial originated as an annual project: two in two years in Barcelona and two in two years in another Mediterranean city.

The initial concept of the Italian ARCI Kids, in collaboration with the Barcelona Municipality, soon revealed itself impractical. Since the Bologna Biennial, in 1988, the Biennial has become a regular event-two every two years-and ever since has never returned to the city of its foundation.

As an innovative program in design activities, the Biennial was and continues to be a revolutionary accomplishment at the organizational level.

Right from its inception, the Biennial assembled national governments, municipalities, and non-profit associations with the common aim of organizing a cultural project with an international dimension for the promotion of young artists and through that dynamic, to approach people and cultures that share the Mediterranean space or are associated with it.

Initially an informal network, since 2001 the Biennial is the center of an institutionalized network through an international association. This is one of the few cultural networks formed in the eighties and nineties that, beyond the theoretical debate and circulation of politicians or technicians, realizes an important project held at regular intervals.

The Biennial project in 1992-93 had lost strength after Marseilles and, above all, after Valencia. Lisbon accepted the challenge of undertaking this initiative at a moment when no other member of the International Organizational Committee wished to host it in its own geographical area.

The International Committee accepted that the Biennial would be developed by an association: the Portuguese Club of Arts and Ideas, which I founded in 1986, inspired by the Biennial project. And it was in this way that, for the first time, a responsible indicated by a cultural association was in charge of the direction of the Biennial of Young Artists from Mediterranean Europe.

It was not easy to raise the funds needed for the realization of the Lisbon Biennial. We had some problems in 1992 and 1993 in obtaining-together with the Portuguese Government's support-the support of the "Lisbon-94 European Capital of Culture." But, in mid-1993, the Commissioner of Culture accepted the challenge, providing the funds for the fulfillment of the Biennial's seventh edition.

We decided to locate all of the Biennial expositions, the activities of the literature area and the Biennial "Off" in the same location: the ancient "Fabrica da Cordoaria Nacional." This facilitated visitors' arrivals and created a meeting space for the artists. Theatrical events, the fashion show, and the gastronomy meeting were distributed in the noble spaces of the city, not far from the exposition space. The artists were all lodged in the same hotel (600 artists and 150 organizers). This was intentionally done to encourage encounters between the artists, journalists, organizers, and cultural professionals.

On the other hand, we demanded efficiency and quality in the installation of the exhibition, as well as the elements of communication, assuring young participants a safe presentation of their work. Finally, we insisted on having a team constantly available for the artists, never forgetting that they are the main reason for the event.

In addition to the Biennial and through the organization's invitation, there were a series of collateral activities in Lisbon, in order to promote national and international publicity for the "Lisbon-94 - European Capital of Culture" event. For the continuity of the project, it was decisive that the Youth Councilman of Turin visit Lisbon, and he was enthusiastic about the experience. Also, the people responsible for "Copenhagen '96 - European Capital of Culture" visited the Lisbon Biennial, which served as a model for the first edition of "ArtGenda," the Baltic Biennial.

In Lisbon an interesting "nuance" took place: through my suggestion, the International Committee approved changing the initial denomination "Biennial of Young Artists from Mediterranean Europe" to "Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean." This small change, with the inclusion of the word "and," was significant: it meant that all countries of the Mediterranean could be present and that the countries of Southern Europe with distant geographical locations-such as Portugal or Slovenia- could participate within their own right, by opening a safe door to the enlargement of the members of the International Committee.

Therefore, Lisbon, the first capital to hold this event, also contributed to the construction of a project which, beyond its cultural dimension, has a political importance that cannot be denied-the Biennial is the sign of a link among peoples and delivers a message: the Other is my neighbor, my neighbor can be my companion, my companion can become a friend.

We are pursuing this difficult task in international politics with success, and that is why it is very important that this positive action in a world of crisis continues shining, if possible with more strength, for the relations in Europe and in the Mediterranean.

LISBOA 1994

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