marble tomb with the words "I Love You" carved in Armenian, words she was reported to have spoken.

There are many ways to engage with political issues, For instance, Osvaldo Romberg's maze-like installation at Sabanci University's Kasa Gallery addresses what he calls the macro-political. In *Building Footprints* (2009) Romberg mixed transparent elements from classical and modern architecture to express layers of time, and to ask us what is remembered and what is being forgotten.

I came away from Istanbul feeling that it was the work outside the biennial that was "political," yet very subtle and effective.

ART

53rd Venice Biennale

"Fare Mondi/Making Worlds"
curated by Daniel Birnbaum
June 7 – November 22, 2009

Christopher Eamon

The 53rd Venice Biennale, like many of its predecessors, seems doomed to displease, the result perhaps of a syndrome of aiming to please everyone. It is revealing that after continuous expansion born from its aspirations for inclusion, more could be learned about the state of global contemporary art at Art Basel than at the grueling and difficult-to-maneuver Venice Biennale. What most visitors tend to expect from biennials is the ability to grasp an overview of contemporary art presented by a specialist in the field. Anything else like conceptualizing the works selected in a way that enlightens or, better, changes, one's view or understanding of the works, is an added bonus. In recent history at the Biennale, neither has been the case.

If Documenta is the Olympics of contemporary art, then the Venice Biennale is its Academy Awards. It was the first of its kind in 1895. It maintains the status of "mother of all biennials" even now that it has been followed by greater numbers and ever-more-specialized biennials and triennials taking place all over the globe. But the birthplace of the modern biennial may be in the long run also the place of its end, if this has not already happened at least symbolically. Born in the golden era of World Expositions so famous for leaving behind their landmarks—London's Crystal Palace, the Eiffel Tower, Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, among others—the Venice Biennale first exhibited decorative and applied arts at its inception. The landmarks of its history can be found in the Giardini, where the pavilions are trenchant reminders of the colonialist context of the fair's birth and subsequent growth as a mainly Eurocentric yet international venue for contemporary art. Over the decades it has worked to rectify the situation of not adequately representing non-Western nations by adding new national representations in off-site pavilions and expanding the main exhibition greatly with the addition of the enormous Arsenale exhibition space in 1980.

This year, the broader Biennale boasted seventy-seven national pavilions, including representative artists from the Republic of Gabon and the Union of Comoros, and forty-four collateral exhibitions, exhibitions not organized by the Biennale organization, but which are welcomed under its umbrella. Even the Arsenale had been greatly expanded. The main exhibition pavilion formerly called the Italian Pavilion has also been enlarged and renamed the Palazzo delle Esposizioni della Biennale. Collateral events included interesting digital works by John Gerrard at the Island of Cortoza, as well as a context-sensitive exhibition of recent works by Mona

Hatoum at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia. The biggest collateral event of all is not included in the Biennale: the massive renovation of the Baroque-era Customs Hall, the Punta della Dogana (itself a symbol of globalization from a former time), by luxury goods magnate Francois Pinault, and the reinstallation of his museum at the Palazzo Grassi, both of which drew many thousands of visitors.

Apart from repeatedly seeing the massive yachts of Pinault, Roman Abramavich and Larry Ellis moored outside the Dogana (because all mega yacht moorings in the Canal Grande were already taken), the pleasures of traveling around Venice to visit over ninety or so offsite pavilions wears painfully thin, especially since the rewards for doing so are mostly not forthcoming. Individual national representations were simply not worth the trek. But this is, in a sense, the legacy of a post-colonial aspiration that in expecting to represent the world, the map for that world has become almost as large. A painfully evident problem is the inconsistency with respect to the mechanisms through which individual nations select representative projects for their pavilions, most evident at the United Arab Emirates pavilion and newly created Italian section at the Arsenale. Both are probably the result of State requirements and, in the case of the latter, internal bureaucracy.

The continuous expansion of sites and venues exasperates viewers at the Arsenale, which is really a endless line of mega installations from one end to the next. It culminates with the weak Instituto Italo-Latino Americano pavilion, consisting of works by twenty artists crammed into one room with no real curatorial vision, the Chinese pavilion and aforementioned U.A.E. and Italian Pavilions. This is before you even get to the newly opened Giardino delle Vergini, if you aren't already too blitzed to notice, a site that this year's Director Daniel Birnbaum calls "a uniquely poetic backdrop for artistic interventions." Indeed, eleven artists installed work in the park, one artfully creating an artificial swamp, another, famed choreographer William Forsythe, stringing stirrups in a tree so that you could "interact with" or become part of the movement of the work. That the press release and Directors' statement makes so much out of a few works placed outside speaks to perhaps the complete outmodedness of large-scale biennials, especially this one. Large-scale exhibitions like this are simply not able to react to truly innovative or multidisciplinary work with any real depth or seriousness.

Biennials have always been about art tourism, and in effect about garnering tourist dollars and demonstrating national power. Indeed that's why World's Fairs and Venice Biennale were created. That one can already indulge in art tourism from the Tirana to Dakar and Havana, and have been able to do so for many years, is perhaps the main reason Venice is failing. It is intent on competing with these much more focused and at times more enlightening exhibitions. While art tourism can be a way to learn about others, it also never really quite gets the touring subject into any position of knowledge *vis à vis* the other, a fact that has hardly been ameliorated in today's much-lauded "global" art world.

All of this is not to say that the main exhibition, save for certain inclusions and barring one's own predilections, is a relatively handsome exhibition with combinations of newer works brought into contact with historical antecedents such as Öyvind Fahlström, the Gutai artists, Lygia Pape, Gordon Matta-Clark, Andre Cadere and Blinky Palermo. Much of this work, especially of Gutai, is rarely seen and enlightening especially in relation to the current resurgence of audience participation and performance practices in art. Many artists in the vein of the latter seem happy to embrace their roles as technicians of the conceptual, where rules and activities can be dreamed up in perpetuity as a kind infinitely generative grammar with no need to infer from history, look at current conditions, or make something other that basically does not self-generate.

Still Birnbaum falls into the classic curatorial trap of explaining the inclusion of historical antecedents as due to their "influence" on the younger artists with

which they are coupled. This is usually apocryphal. Indeed, the reason it is so important to see works likes these included in a contemporary context is that these works and these artists for one reason or another *did not* have the influence they should have had. In the case of Fahlström and Gutai, they suffered respectively from Anglo-American and Western Eurocentrism, which is not to say that their contemporaries were not interested in, and aware of them, rather that their legacy has been so diminished that they need to be included, remembered and reinserted into the contemporary art dialogue today.

Still the timeliness of the inclusion of some of the other historical works, such as Pape and Cadere seems belated in this context. And of course Yoko Ono's Fluxus works jotted down during two years in sixties seem to have been repeated in exhibitions everywhere for the past decade. You can't get away from them, but whether she or Fluxus has influenced a younger generation is another question.

In any case, Birnbaum's main exhibition at the former Italian pavilion is fine, in fact, refreshing, in an era of the Euro-curator-as-brand. By that model, the brand oftentimes writes of major paradigm shifts in Western epistemology every time it makes an exhibition. Think of Nicholas Bourriaud's Tate Triennial, which is somehow meant to support his thesis that a major rupture in Western consciousness is about to occur on the occasion of his exhibition.[1]

If we return to the curatorial goal of changing our understanding of works on display, Birnbaum seems to find it a valuable concern. In Birnbaum's conceptualization for the Biennale, he is not guilty of intellectual overreaching. Indeed, his almost banal concept of "Making Worlds" is either a tease about his philosophical underpinnings, or a complete accident. Given his background as art historian and philosopher his conception is most likely based on an unmentioned intertext kept a secret so as not to alienate. The title "Making Worlds" is a contraction of a key idea in the philosophy of aesthetics developed in the late fifties and sixties by Anglo-American philosopher Nelson Goodman. The key tenets of what can be considered his constructivist philosophy is that human consciousness constructs the world through interpretation and the creation of symbols.

Art in creating a relatively dense situation creates a world rich in symbols just as the real world is constructed through symbolization, and as such can be considered at no less a level. Goodman's ideas, which are conceived basically within the relatively obscure and already bankrupt discipline of the philosophy of aesthetics, parallels an attempt in the same time period to view everything in human experience as knowable only through the structure of language. In Goodman's case, symbols and symbolization, rather than language proper, create worlds, which therefore can be considered *made*. The context is significant because within the fields of analytical and Anglo-American philosophy this sort of constructivism was rather a leap. Only Richard Rorty made more of the idea of the knowability of the world outside of language from within the Anglo-American tradition. However, as is common in the field, Goodman could not keep from engaging in the creation of shopping list of more or less dense types of symbolization, better or less good attempts at world making, and which of the arts fits which bill of goods, all as a way to compensate for the fact that the idea that *art builds worlds*—literally different worlds—was already grossly out of touch with what contemporary art had become by the early sixties. For better or worse, these attempts from within the philosophy of aesthetics, no matter how progressive or maverick they may seem in hindsight, were late in describing how art was contemporaneously being made and conceived by artists.

In evoking, at least in his title, the philosophy of art as world making, Birnbaum's subliminal choice for an exhibition on the current state of contemporary art worldwide seems out of step, and yet as a title, and title alone, it is as sufficiently inoffensive to at least let much of the work and the curatorial choice for display, combination, and pacing speak for itself. For this, Birnbaum should be applauded.

If the end of the Venice Biennale comes about from an exhaustion of its own aspirations, it is also because the impetus for its existence, art tourism and a predilection to "discover," like Columbus, new worlds and new artists has outrun its usefulness. World art tourism is more available and more adequately attempted elsewhere. Contemporary art as we know it, colonizes more and more of the globe. It's no wonder that the term "global" in art began to be used around the same time as the term globalization in finance *and* the birth of many of the new biennials in the early-to-mid nineties. Colonizing the contemporary as "the Same" has been expanding for twenty years and now the showcasing of sameness and difference is done better at the regional level, for reasons of self-discovery or otherwise. This is the nature of the exhibition form known as the biennial. For all the texts criticizing Venice, few have taken a look at the biennial and its replication as useful at times and in certain contexts, and vastly inadequate at others.

NOTE

1 As the press release states, Bourriaud's Triennial "argues that the historical period defined by post-modernism is coming to an end, and a new art form for the twenty-first century is emerging...." He explains that "while the [1970s] economy was severing its ties with concrete geography, culture was becoming divorced from history as a coherent scenario. Postmodernism was the story of this disconnection, leading to a reified conception of 'origins.' What I call 'altermodern' is the narrative of our reconnection with both, through a new set of parameters linked to globalization: instantaneity, availability, displacements ..." (Bourriaud 2009). That historicism is part and parcel of Modernity and what we call Post-modernism is meant to be outside historical periodization in the first place is lost in this type of brand-consolidating statement.

REFERENCES

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Bhaskar Sarkar. Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition

Durham and London: Duke UP, 2009, 372 pp.

Jonathan Owens

On August 14th, 1947 a sovereign Pakistan was created, and the following day saw the creation of a sovereign India, and event known as Parition. Bhaskar Sarkar's *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* adds a much-needed addition to the quickly expanding catalogue of scholarly work on Indian cinema. In his book, Sarkar considers the effects of Partition on the world's largest film industry through an examination of Bollywood, Bengali, and other regional cinemas, as well as Indian television. Sarkar's analysis both addresses and moves past an understanding of Indian film merely as part of India's nation-building project. Rather, Sarkar suggests that the relationship between Indian cinema and nation has, since Indian sovereignty, been fluid and complex. In his introduction, he cautions that rather than view Partition as India's originary trauma, one which has caused all of India's present "woes," Partition should be understood within a matrix of discourse that continues to change. For instance, in the book's last chapter, Sarkar asserts that in recent years Partition has been consciously mobilized by contemporary cultural and political trends. This mobilization demonstrates the self-awareness that, according to Sarkar, the media has of its own role in memory and archiving history.

The book's seven chapters and coda are divided into two sections. The first section of the book focuses on the relative silence of representation of Partition in the thirty years immediately following the event. The second section examines how and why this silence was broken through textual analysis of specific cases of the representation of Partition within Indian film and television—what the author calls "the return of repressed." As far as the increased rise in Partition