

May 2010

ICI announces a new traveling exhibition model

PEOPLE'S BIENNIAL



Rethinking exhibitions in local contexts

Co-curated by Harrell Fletcher and Jens Hoffmann

Organized by Independent Curators International (ICI), New York

Tour Dates: September 2010 Through May 2012

Can we change our expectations and ways of looking at art? Is it possible to escape traditional notions of taste and artistic product? Can curators, artists and audiences collaboratively challenge established curatorial models?

People's Biennial is artist Harrell Fletcher's and curator Jens Hoffmann's response to several challenging issues within the often-isolated world of art. Most major exhibitions in the United States operate within limited parameters, focusing primarily on art from just a few cities. Today's American art world (from which Fletcher and Hoffmann acknowledge they emerge) is increasingly exclusive, and has often turned the spaces where art is produced and exhibited into detached and privileged havens. It tends to function—in the words of New York Times critic Holland Cotter—as “efficiently as a full-service marketing industry on the corporate model.”

In contrast, Fletcher and Hoffmann propose *People's Biennial* as a creative fracture with the norm. What drives the idea of the exhibition is a curiosity on the side of the curators to explore the little-known, the overlooked, the marginalized and excluded as well as the desire to present eccentric and under-recognized artistic positions usually dismissed by the mainstream art world. The curators seek to expand prevalent attitudes about what is considered significant and relevant art practice. As Fletcher states, “*Just like any other curator, I'm looking for the work that's most interesting to me ... there are typical ways of finding artists for an exhibition. We're trying to restructure that so we uncover people and works that otherwise wouldn't be noticed or included.*”

collaborative effort with a strong research component, *People's Biennial* engages curators at hosting venues and local communities to open up the art discovery and selection process beyond the realm of art schools and art galleries. It involves five art institutions in five cities in the United States which will also present the final exhibition. The curators are visiting each local community for one week to conduct research and will choose works by five artists from each city that may not be established or might be self-taught. At every stop along the way, the curators are participating in an open forum where the community can suggest leads to little-known artists whom they think should contribute to *People's Biennial*. In open calls and “show-and-tell” events they have the opportunity to meet local artists and discuss their work. As Steven Matijcio, curator at host institution SECCA, explains, “*one of the most compelling notions about the People's Biennial is active collaboration of five arts institutions across the United States to realize a collective exhibition model. Each of those communities, cities, states, will be*

contributing ... you have a national perspective, an international perspective through ICI, but at the core is an intense localism. We're really discovering, listening and responding to these eccentric, idiosyncratic talents across the country".

As a curatorial experiment, **People's Biennial** follow an eclectic history of projects including 'People's Choice' (1981), an exhibition organized by Group Material that explored similar themes of local community, featuring personal objects from residents in New York's East Village. 'The Folk Archive', co-organized by British artists Alan Kane and Jeremy Deller in 2000, was a similar look into what the larger public might gain from looking at vernacular art and visual culture one-step removed from the art world's many trends and fashions. Jens Hoffmann also cites Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States* as an example that offers an alternative methodology in this attempt to map out American art and creativity today,. The exhibition will privilege art's relationship to local communities, their histories and current realities and will examine the local specificity of the artworks produced in each city.

About the guest curators, Harrell Fletcher and Jens Hoffmann

Harrell Fletcher is an artist who has worked collaboratively and individually on socially engaged, interdisciplinary projects for more than fifteen years; his work has been exhibited throughout the United States, and in Europe. He is a professor of art and social practice at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon.

Jens Hoffmann is director of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco. He has curated over three dozen exhibitions since the late 1990s. He was director of exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London from 2003 to 2007. Hoffmann is an adjunct professor at the California College of the Arts, San Francisco, a guest professor at the Nuova Accademia de Belle Arti, Milan and a faculty member at Goldsmith College, University of London. He is the co-curator for the 12th Istanbul Biennial in fall 2011.

Exhibition Itinerary

Portland Institute of Contemporary Art
Portland, OR
September 10 - November 21, 2010

The Dahl Art Center
Rapid City, SD
January 14 – March 27, 2011

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art,
Winston-Salem, NC
July 8 -September 18, 2011

Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
Scottsdale, AZ
October 15 - January 15, 2012

Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College
Haverford, PA
January 27 - March 2, 2012

Exhibition Credit Line

People's Biennial is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by ICI (Independent Curators International), New York. Guest curators for the exhibition are Harrell Fletcher and Jens Hoffmann. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, by a grant from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation; the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; the ICI Board of Trustees and ICI Benefactors Barbara and John Robinson.

About ICI

Founded in 1975, ICI (Independent Curators International) produces exhibitions, events, publications, and training opportunities for diverse audiences around the world. A catalyst for independent thinking, ICI connects emerging and established curators, artists, and institutions, to forge international networks and generate new forms of collaboration. Working across disciplines and historical precedents, the organization is a hub that provides access to the people, ideas, and practices that are key to current developments in the field, inspiring fresh ways of seeing and contextualizing contemporary art.



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