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MANIFESTA 8, THE EUROPEAN BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART CLOSES IN SPAIN ON JANUARY 9, 2011



Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art

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On January 9, 2011, Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, came to a close after 100 days in the host cities of Murcia and Cartagena in southeast Spain. Manifesta 8 took place in 14 venues, five of which were historical buildings specially refurbished for Manifesta, and five media spaces. For the first time, the Biennial integrated a sub-theme in its title - a dialogue with northern Africa - as a direct consequence of the geopolitical issues present in the region. In different interdisciplinary projects, this theme was sometimes explicit, sometimes inferred and sometimes highlighted in historical films, photographs and aligned works by the participating artists, with particular emphasis on the history of Arabic culture rooted in the Region of Murcia. Moreover, aspects of migration, refugee status and the new borders of Europe, both geographical and psychological, were closely investigated. Manifesta never makes claims to quantify the number of artists based on national identities, nor to qualify only those projects which shed light on specific constraints. In principle this Manifesta was proposing a new universality, connecting

the knowledge and expertise of three curatorial teams from Europe, the former East bloc, northern Africa and the Middle East. Selected for Manifesta 8, Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, Chamber of Public Secrets and tranzit.org showcased works by 120 artists from more than 45 countries, most of which newly produced especially for Manifesta 8.

The positive results achieved by Manifesta 8 in the Region of Murcia have been attested by 110,000 visitors, who have been welcomed at the 14 venues during the exhibition period.

In respect to the interrelation with northern Africa, another focal point is the ongoing project Incubator for a Pan-African Roaming Biennial. The Incubator is a year-long, nomadic project formed in response to a proposal by two Manifesta 8 curators, Bassam El Baroni and Jeremy Beaudry of Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum. It consists of a symposium held during the opening weekend of Manifesta 8, a website (www.panafricannial.org), a workshop due to take place in an African city in April 2011, and a publication to be released in September 2011. For Hedwig Fijen, Director of Manifesta and Esther Regueira, Manifesta 8 General Coordinator, the Incubator serves as an example of how a contemporary biennial can develop today, transforming the closed time-frame of Manifesta 8 and its direct relation to the audience into a long-term, sustainable project. This concept is based on a far-reaching series of open discussions, beyond the usual proposal of a static exhibition structure, and it has the in-built ability to reflect and question itself.

Clearly Manifesta 8 was not merely a series of exhibitions. It incorporated a large number of Parallel Events spread throughout the region of Murcia, as well as television and radio programs, publications, Internet sites and multi-media projects. Over a two-year period, Manifesta's aim to introduce new educational tools and establish new educational practices in its host region has been developed and implemented, culminating in an extensive education program during the 100 days of exhibition.

The 380-page Manifesta 8 catalogue in English and Spanish, with contributions by Tirdad Zolghadr, Mark von Schlegell and Olivia Plender among others, offers an insight into the different curatorial approaches which helped to form Manifesta 8. It provides points for further discussion on the current discourse on contemporary art practice. It is available for purchase at www.silvanaeditoriale.it

Manifesta 8 is an initiative of the International Foundation Manifesta in collaboration with the Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia (CARM) and Murcia Cultural.

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