

his exploration of 'forms of circulation' simply as a pragmatic response to the challenges posed by the popularity of the Hermitage, enabling the co-existence of multiple versions of the museum. The research process he outlines, in which visitor movements yield data used to design distinct experiences, demonstrates that museums continue to function as sites and spaces for the production of publics in a very literal sense. But the 'publicness' of the museum experience (whether actual or imagined) is also inevitably called into question by strategies that produce versions of the museum, tailored either to pre-existing social groups, or finely-tuned to the needs and desires of special customers.

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THE FALMOUTH CONVENTION, 20–23 MAY 2010

Reviewed by Katherine Daley-Yates

'The future is the countryside!' exclaimed Hans Ulrich Obrist as he began his introduction to the conversation he was about to have with artist Kader Attia, at a late-night event at The Poly in Falmouth (The Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society) that concluded the first day of The Falmouth Convention. In 2009 a series of forums and conversations was held in Cornwall with resident artists, curators and writers in response to submitting a bid for Cornwall to host Manifesta in 2014. The Falmouth Convention developed out of these discussions. The ambition was to situate the conference in relation to the

specific location of Cornwall and examine commissioning in other dispersed rural areas.

The biennial (both core and periphery) as a format for international exhibition making has proliferated over the last twenty years, and has been well documented. However, the majority of biennials still operate from primarily urban locations, so the proposition for Cornwall to host Manifesta provides an entirely rural context to develop a biennial format exhibition, rather than include the suburban or rural as merely an afterthought. Is the countryside the future? Is there a call to explore new spaces for the production and presentation of contemporary art – art which is not dominated by the specifics of urban locations? And if so, how might a biennial operate within rural locations?

The internationally renowned critic Lucy Lippard gave the keynote lecture. Her presentation provided a historical context for the weekend that mapped out artists moving out of gallery space and working directly in the landscape. Her presentation did not attempt to suggest how to radically re-adjust the structure of biennials or commissioning in rural contexts, but instead she suggested that a deeper engagement within a local situation could be best found by investing in the 'local artist'. Was this perhaps a provocative statement to gauge reaction from the audience?

The next day, the convention continued to emphasize the local with a programme of six field trips devised and led by individual or groups of artists based in or with links to Cornwall. The different trips proposed explorations of the Cornish landscape, through mining, the history of the artist colonies, connection to the sea through engineering, as well as personal responses to the landscape. The field trips had the potential for attendees (many of whom had travelled from outside the region) to have an opportunity to engage with the Cornish landscape from a local perspective and to understand some of the more immediate and contemporary issues that exist within this environment, such as high levels of deprivation, decline in industry and the delicate relationship the economy has with the rise in tourism. However, the field trip that I chose to attend – *Boat Trip* – led by artists Lucy Gunning and Tacita Dean (previous students at Falmouth in the 1980s) seemed to operate on a surface level, failing to penetrate the contemporary situation. It was particularly difficult to engage with the journey as Gunning and Dean's intimate conversation, revisiting their old haunts across Falmouth, excluded the members of the group. As Lippard remarked, 'Tourism is too often discussed solely from the viewpoint of the visitors rather than the visited'.

On Saturday, the schedule was split into three sections: 'Commissioning for non-urban sites and situations'; 'Residences and creative communities'; and 'Biennials and large-scale international exhibitions'. Tom van Gestel's contribution was an inspiring presentation of projects that had taken place in rural situations from the late 1970s to present day. Van Gestel, who currently works as artistic leader and senior curator for SKOR (Foundation for Art and Public Space, Amsterdam), presented a range of projects including: commissions from Sonsbeck 71, Henrick Hakansson's *Field Library* (2001) and Marinus Boezem's *The Green Cathedral* (1978–1966). Sadly there was little time for van Gestel to go into any real depth on these particular projects as most speakers only had twenty minutes in which to deliver their presentation. Van Gestel had directly focused on historic and contemporary commissions that truly engaged with the rural environment, which was missing from other delegates' presentations. What was also lacking was an opportunity for the audience to take part and ask questions.



Figure 1: Looking back over Falmouth Bay the setting for The Falmouth Convention. Photograph by Katherine Daley-Yates.

Tacita Dean's presentation, 'Being Commissioned ...' provided one of the few artist's responses within the convention. Dean spoke from a personal perspective about being commissioned and the difficult situation that the process often creates, using first-hand accounts of working with commissioners in order to give examples of how particular pieces of work had come to fruition. Her account was refreshingly honest and often critical of the constricting nature of producing work for a biennial context or in response to a very specific situation, although Dean did acknowledge that the process of commissioning had helped create some of her most successful work.

'Residencies and creative communities' created a session that was characterized by the diverging opinions of Adam Sutherland (Director of Grizedale Arts) and Kitty Scott (Director of Visual Arts at The Banff Centre), both representing two very different organizations. Sutherland proclaimed that artists must be useful when they come to Grizedale, moving away from romantic associations of the 'artists' retreat' within the landscape, in favour of more direct and real collaborations with local communities. In contrast Scott argued for an open-ended approach, which allows artists to experiment without the pressure of a resolute ending. However, in the context of the convention, Scott's presentation seemed out of touch, with no reference to the local community in Banff in relation to the work created by the artists on their residencies. Some of the work seemed highly introspective and unrealistic when transported to the context of the UK and its current funding climate. This was further underlined by the announcement at the end of the convention by Andrew Nairne, Executive Arts Director for Art Council England, stating that we should all expect a 'storm' within future public funding.

Returning to the question proposed at the start of this article, how might a biennial operate within rural locations? You cannot answer this question

by presenting just one example and perhaps it will become more apparent as the rural comes into focus and is further addressed through growing internationally recognized activity. Towards the end of the convention, the individual presentations made way for more group discussion and feedback. On reflection and considering some of the opinions that have since appeared on the convention website, it was perhaps an oversight not to include more local voices from those operating in Cornwall. This could have been achieved by programming the field trip feedback at an earlier point, for example early on Saturday morning. This alteration in structure could have further allowed the conjunction of the local with the international and facilitated consideration of the recurring dilemma of how local practitioners feature within international biennials, which only intervene within a context temporarily.

What became apparent was the dedication to producing a programme that would not be governed by time. My thoughts returned to Tom van Gestel's presentation and in particular *The Green Cathedral* (1978–1966). This particular work has so much inspiration to offer when considering how little time is often allowed within the context of developing public artworks and the trust between Boezem and the commissioner. If Manifesta does choose Cornwall as its home for 2014, it will be an exciting prospect to see how the programme develops, plays out and what the resonating effects might be for the region, but perhaps there needs to be a slight air of caution. The Bergen Biennial Conference (September 2009) highlighted the need to think carefully about perennial exhibitions in relation to relevancy and the limit of the format as new models emerge. Virginia Button stated, 'Artist engagement and audience participation had been at the heart of curatorial thinking', which further makes an argument for a durational approach. Therefore, one cannot help thinking that the ambitions that currently exist within Cornwall for a programme that can transcend a particular moment might dissolve if an external institutional structure, such as Manifesta, has the opportunity to leave its imprint.

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