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**A PLATFORM FOR IDENTITY: USING LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITION  
TO POSITION BAHIA, BRAZIL'S CONTEMPORARY CONDITION**

Angela Kay Daniels

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A PLATFORM FOR IDENTITY: USING LARGE-SCALE EXHIBITION TO  
POSITION BAHIA, BRAZIL'S CONTEMPORARY CONDITION

QUALIFYING PAPER  
SUBMITTED BY ANGELA KAY DANIELS  
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A Platform for Identity:  
Using Large-Scale Exhibition to Position Bahia, Brazil's Contemporary Condition

Angela Kay Daniels

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**Abstract**

Large-scale, perennial exhibitions, or biennials, have become the venue par excellence for the display of contemporary art in the twenty-first century. The majority of scholars interpreting biennials in this relatively new field of study cite the Venice Biennial as the historical origin of the biennial concept, and therefore point of comparison, for each subsequent adaptation of the biennial model to the present. Originally, host cities implemented these events for the purpose of showcasing their industrial, technological, and generally modernizing tendencies, including the sophisticated grasp and execution of Western art trends by their citizens.

The combination of experiencing cutting-edge artistic production in the rarified space constructed specifically for its display, set apart from the everyday built environment, imbued the biennial exhibition model with legitimating powers to recognize art trends and elevate the reputation of the cities that hosted them. Dissatisfied and excluded from these Eurocentric events that privileged and exhibited art authored by and about Western subjects, a pioneering curatorial group in the 1980s appropriated and adapted the biennial model to meet the specific needs and realities of the spaces and citizens operating outside these hegemonic centers. This group was known as the Third World Biennials in a new global center, Havana, Cuba.

With the recent conclusion of Bahia, Brazil's third biennial, this study seeks to interpret the purpose of the biennial from Bahia's specific contemporary context, biennial history, and curatorial design. By outlining conclusions drawn from studies of biennials conducted thus far, outlining the biennial literature produced for this event, and by visual analysis of the Public Archives installation, this research will illustrate how the cumulative, constructive efforts and exchange created between the Bahia biennial and visitors proposes multiple identities for today's Bahia.

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## Introduction

To attempt to understand biennials, then is to attempt to understand something crucial about our culture today.

-Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo<sup>1</sup>

Despite the strong impetus by art exhibitions to divorce art from its context by displaying it within the specialized, “white cube” space of the museum, post-modern studies in the field of the social sciences, culture studies, and art history in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries now affirm a strong connection between visual arts and cultural expressions of identity.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas McEvelley, a distinguished art critic and contributor to the periodical of contemporary art, *Artforum*, claims art’s success as a social actor in communal identity construction hinges on art’s convincing ability to present inherent, shared meanings. The community acknowledges the representative nature of these meanings to aspects of the group, and then decides how these meanings can shape, preserve, or redefine the community’s identity.<sup>3</sup>

Located in the northeastern quadrant of the country of Brazil, the state of Bahia actively mines its history and presents itself to the local and international

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo, eds., *The Biennial Reader: The Bergen Biennial Conference*, vol. 2 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas McEvelley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1992), 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

arena through material culture. This study will examine Bahia's use of the large-scale perennial exhibition model, or biennial, populated by artworks to propose multiple identities for Bahia's contemporary condition as a lived history that everyone is important in shaping.

With the closure of the Third Bienal da Bahia on September 7, 2014, forty-six years removed from its second edition in 1968, an opportunity opens for critical research into Bahia's biennial genealogy and how it presents itself. To my knowledge, no previous biennial study has treated this particular biennial genealogy, and so I seek to insert Bahia's narrative in the biennial studies field. Given that forty-six years have passed since the second edition, one might ask why revisit the biennial now? This study proposes to examine the Third Bienal da Bahia through the use of post-modern, post-colonial, Marxist, and contextual analyses to expose the connection between contemporary manifestations of biennials and processes of identity formation, revision, and/or preservation. By revealing the Third Bienal da Bahia to be a laboratory for propositions of Bahia's contemporary identity, this study establishes Bahia's unique biennial signature which democratically invites all of its residents to participate in this self-authoring exercise reflective of larger Bahian and Brazilian political positioning.

I argue that Bahia's curatorial team for the third edition shaped the event's form to be expansive format with venues placed throughout the city to reflect



and create the event's emphasis on discursivity. The combination of the decentralized organization of the event throughout the city, the themes and ideas conveyed in the biennial literature published in conjunction with event, and a particular case study of the biennial's larger themes proposed at Salvador's Public Archives constructs a body of propositions for Bahia's contemporary selfhood. A specific sample of artworks from the Public Archives venue and the empowerment they grant to biennial visitors argues for a democratic signature to this biennial event and the acceptance of multiple sides to contemporary identity.

By means of postcolonial analysis I illustrate the transformation of the contemporary biennial model as a declarative action by marginalized locales to serve and present self-authored ideas about local interests. I provide an overview of transformation of the biennial model from the Venetian iteration to the present Bahian biennial under study to illustrate how the Bahian curatorial team adapted and structured the format to propose and communicate aspects of Bahian identity. While the form of Bahia's biennial does not match any other biennial absolutely, the biennial's dispersion throughout the city of Salvador (as well as the region), the intentional dismissal of traditional classification methods and use of theory in favor a contextual recovery through memory and discussion, and its offer of alternative histories in artworks like those staged in the Public Archives identifies this biennial as a counter-discourse.

Secondly, I discuss the non-traditional method of research conducted by the curatorial for laying the contextual groundwork for the biennial's events. The general non-proclamatory tone adopted by curatorial team becomes evident in the proposals crafted not with privileged, higher knowledge, but equitably through community engagement seen in Bahia's supplemental biennial literature. In doing so, I point to specific literary passages that illustrate the project's discursive character and engagement of Bahia's complexity as a region. I will highlight how this praxis of contextual creation through memory and other non-traditional means grounds the biennial and its aims at the level of local interests showing the community's help in constructing the event is just as crucial as cultural and museum institutions.

In the final section, I visually analyze the larger biennial themes and aims by describing the artworks and mediated encounters within the Public Archives venue. Through a critical analysis of the visitor's experience, I explain how the biennial viewer, upon visiting the installation at the Public Archives, would engage with the art and cultural objects in a mediated process allowing the viewer to engage with the art in a personal and subjective way.

While the global pool of biennials is vast, I have chosen to follow transformations in the form and intentions of the Venetian and Havana iterations for the examination of the influence of the event's organization on intended

meanings within the first section. Within the sources gathered for this research and the field of biennial studies, scholars consider both models to be emblematic examples of the exhibition type. I also acknowledge, due to my lack of command of the Portuguese language, the content of this study where it applies to analyses of the Third Bienal da Bahia specifically, has had to rely on English translations of the original Portuguese provided by the authors of the biennial literature. Because of this reality, some nuances in translation may have been lost or simplified, but relying on translations created by the authors commissioned in consort with the biennial, ensures that the general thrust of the content's meaning is not lost. Finally, because I had the opportunity to be one of the international visitors of the Third Bienal da Bahia in August 2014 during the event's second season, some of the observations of the activities conducted at the Public Archives will be my own regarding the mediated experience and visual analysis of the artwork. These firsthand accounts of the Public Archives installation support this study's position of the local positioning of the overall biennial project, and so are crucial to illustrate the perspective taken by the curatorial team.

### **The Long Road: Bahia's Fraught History with Identity**

*In Brazil's Living Museum: Race, Reform, and Tradition in Bahia* (2010),

Anadelia A. Romo devotes an entire text to Bahia's revisionist forays into

regional identity presentation framed within Brazil's nationalistic pursuits lasting much of the twentieth century. She states that "such a transformation was in no way natural or inevitable; rather, it resulted from sustained, and often controversial, efforts."<sup>4</sup> By following various historical characters pivotal within Bahia's racial narratives, Romo reveals Bahia's repetitive efforts to reframe relationships to the state's history in times of political transition and self-fashion new official histories in response.<sup>5</sup> The persistent romanticism of Bahia as a preserve of Brazilian traditional culture, a byproduct of Brazil and Bahia's mid-twentieth century isolationist policies forwarded by the Vargas era, still resonates in Brazilian consciousness today.<sup>6</sup>

In the contemporary period, the power to redefine identity and project it outward to various audiences resides in stagings of the large-scale, perennial exhibition, or biennial, as it is commonly known.<sup>7</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill's cultural studies research into the proliferation of biennial appearances in the late-

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<sup>4</sup> Anadelia A. Romo, *Brazil's Living Museum: Race, Reform, and Tradition in Bahia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, see page 6 in the Romo's introduction where she summarizes Bahia's many identity transformations beginning with its earliest identity as the capital of Portugal's colonial government to the location of the nation's heartland in the twentieth century.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 48. Please see page one for a description of the contemporary romantic ideal of Bahia in Brazilian consciousness, and page 48 for an explanation of the Vargas administration's aim to refashion Bahian identity as a birthplace of the nation to align with the nation's broader withdrawal from international political engagement.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas McEvilley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1992), 79-80.

twentieth and early twenty-first century attributes this spike in number as a response to the “decentralizing” effects of globalization in a post-colonial world.<sup>8</sup>

Extrinsic factors that contributed to the proliferation of biennials stem from political and economic objectives now widely shared by cities and regions around the world. These objectives- integrally related to one another- include the competitive positioning of the city (or region) within the region, nation, and world . . . and/or staging the cosmopolitanism, sophistication, and contemporaneity of the location to both residents and foreigners . . . fostering civic pride on a local, regional, and/or national scale; and other objectives intended to enhance the quality of both resident life and visitor experience.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the state of Bahia (as well as Brazil) experienced influential changes to its respective specific contexts mobilizing interpreters of Bahian history to react and transform for internal and external audiences within the last three decades. In an analysis of Brazil’s international policy published in 2013 by Sean W. Burges entitled, “Brazil as a bridge between old and new powers?,” Burges notes Brazil’s recent diplomatic maneuverings into leadership and intermediary roles on behalf of the nations of South America along South-South and South-North relations (referring to the northern, i.e. colonizing hemispheres versus colonized southern hemisphere territories), respectively stating,

The ability of Brazilian diplomats to carry off this double identity rests in the country’s carefully constructed position as the

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<sup>8</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill, “Becoming Global: Contemporary Art World in the Age of the Biennials Boom,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013), 51-52.

<sup>9</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill, “Becoming Global: Contemporary Art Worlds in the Age of the Biennials Boom,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013), 66.

intermediate or bridging ground between the South and the North. In this context the role of bridge-builder offers Brazil three advantages that have only coincidental alignment with what existing powers would label good international citizenship: (a) controlling the flow of political and ideational interaction back and forth between the North and South; (b) exacting the 'toll' for traffic in each direction; (c) being indispensable to the international system because it is seen as the link between old and emerging powers.<sup>10</sup>

To accomplish its political reformulation, Burges recognizes Brazil's innovation in global engagement policy, specifically the country's argument for resolutions to Southern issues crafted from Southern experience; for a "shift in domestic thinking" by engaging with Africa; and by proposing South-defined "'rules of the road' for global governance" by advocating for formations of Brazilian-led negotiating coalitions.<sup>11</sup>

As Brazil strives to revise its role within global politics from an autonomous, self-authoring position, so too has it continued to attend to political transformations in the domestic landscape. From 1964 to 1985, Brazil's government and citizens fell increasingly under the prohibitive rule of military dictatorship. Inaugurated in 1964 with the military coup d'état of then president, Joao Goulart's government by General Ernesto Geisel, the action signaled the

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<sup>10</sup> Sean W. Burges, "Brazil as a bridge between old and new powers?," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944- )*: *Negotiating the Rise of New Powers* 89, no. 3 (May 2013), 577-578.

<sup>11</sup> Sean W. Burges, "Brazil as a bridge between old and new powers?," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944- )*: *Negotiating the Rise of New Powers* 89, no. 3 (May 2013), 579-580.

beginning of increasingly repressive measures by the military-backed executive branch, including a series of Institutional Acts to the constitution from 1964 to 1968. One of the Institutional Acts, number five, directly affected critics of the military government by issuing a legislative basis to enable the imprisonment of persons found to be politically dissident- such as the founding artists of the 1966 and 1968 Bahian biennial exhibitions.<sup>12</sup>

The Third Bienal da Bahia concluded on September 7, 2014 (fig. 1). With one hundred days of lectures, films, conferences, art shows, theater productions, etc., the Third Bienal broached the first full step to close the distance of the forty-six-year gap since the untimely closure of the second edition in 1968, despite the state's proposal to revisit the project five years prior.<sup>13</sup> The plans for a third biennial exhibition for the region unfolded within a regional, if not national, climate of heady redemocratization, newly felt to the fullest as the political structures clinging on from the dictatorship era were finally fully shirked from the government's legislation.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of activities comprising the biennial exhibition concentrated in Salvador, Bahia's capital city, but included thirty-one other sites in various

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<sup>12</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, online ed., s.v. "Institutional Acts: Brazilian legislation" [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com) (accessed October 3, 2015). Please also see BBC News, "Timeline: Brazil," BBC News, August 14, 2012 [news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk) (accessed October 1, 2015), for a synopsis of major events in Brazil's history, particularly important acts occurring in Brazil's period of military rule.

<sup>13</sup> Tatiana Ma Gold, "Bienal de Arte da Bahia supera 46 anos de silêncio: 'um trauma vencido', diz curador," *Acasoarte.com.br*, May 6, 2014, [acasoarte.com.br/bienal-de-art-da-bahia-supera-46-anos-de-silencio-um-trauma-vencido-diz-curador/](http://acasoarte.com.br/bienal-de-art-da-bahia-supera-46-anos-de-silencio-um-trauma-vencido-diz-curador/) (accessed September 26, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

municipalities around the region (fig.2). In order to accomplish this feat, the *Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia* (Museum of Modern Art of Bahia (MAM-BA)) partnered with the *Secretaria de Cultura do Estado* (Secretary of State for Culture (SECULT-BA)) headed by a team of curators sourced from Brazil, including MAM-BA's current director, Marcelo Rezende; Ayrson Heráclito, visual artist and teacher; and Ana Pato, researcher and former executive director of the *Associação Cultural Videobrasil* (Videobrasil Cultural Association) (fig. 3, 4).<sup>15</sup> The Third Bienal da Bahia's proposal of its aim given in *Contorno Magazine*, a publication printed in conjunction with biennial activities staged before, during, and after the biennial's closure, claims to,

...steer by its two main axles: the work on the library and the archives, and the human experience regarding particularities of geographic and climatic conditions, looking for, above all, the possibility of dialogue between traditions and the fields of knowledge through contact and research.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, in searching for "the human experience regarding particularities of geographic and climatic conditions," and presenting these findings within the biennial event, I argue that the biennial functioned as a vehicle for locally-constructed ideational proposals. It is this facet of Bahia's third biennial that warrants further art historical research because it can demonstrate

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<sup>15</sup> Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, "Bienal da Bahia (Bahia Biennial)," Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, [mambahia.com/bienal-bahia/](http://mambahia.com/bienal-bahia/) (accessed September 20, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAM-BA), "Não Há, Ó Gente, Ó Não (There Ain't, Oh Folks, Oh No)." *Contorno/05*, September, 2014.



how decisions pertaining to the biennial's structural organization and manifestation in a prescribed area creates opportunities for revisions, formations, and recoveries of the host location's identit(ies) by the host itself.

To the best of this study's knowledge, no previous scholarship in any field exists that takes the Third Bienal da Bahia as the focus of study specifically.

However, previous scholarship does investigate contextual circumstances contributing to biennial formation as an area of study.<sup>17</sup> A limited number of projects address the development of individual biennial genealogies,<sup>18</sup> and some biennial anthologies compile critical discourse on the topic to urge future study to consider individual biennials from within their own contexts.<sup>19</sup>

### **A Living Thing: Keeping Pace with the Changing Biennial Paradigm**

Lawrence Alloway analyzes the Venice Biennale's internal adaptations to arrive at a genealogy of the institution over time from 1895 to 1968. This study follows Alloway's assertion that the majority of scholarly focus on biennials views these exhibitions like an autonomous art object. To provide a remedy for this simplistic interpretation, he recommends the scholar view it as a

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<sup>17</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill, "Becoming Global: Contemporary Art Worlds in the Age of the Biennials Boom," (PhD diss., New York University, 2013), 55 applies culture studies to compile reasons for new models of biennials to form, but also secondarily issues a call to future biennial researchers to examine the biennial-in-question's specific contexts to identify the specific formation circumstances.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, LTD., 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo, eds., *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, vol. 1 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 19.

communicative entity that changes shape over time, but does not lose “its legibility as an institution,” the beginnings of which can be seen taking shape with the reintroduction of the biennial in Bahia.<sup>20</sup>

Joan Fowler’s article, “The Making of Rosc (Or the Struggle to Succeed),” takes as its subject for analysis, the proposition for the biennial exhibition, Rosc, staged in Dublin, Ireland. Planning to integrate local art production alongside international art, Fowler fears the inevitable counter-productive comparisons drawn from this display choice, in addition to benefits for the local audience falling short and the nomadic international audience’s unfamiliarity with Irish art production.<sup>21</sup> By the curatorial team’s decision to largely omit local contextual dimensions from the biennial displays, the author questions the success of the biennial to illustrate Irish art production as an aspect of larger international trends.<sup>22</sup> Based on Fowler’s observations, it becomes clear that the strengths of contemporary biennial productions, and an aspect emphasized by Bahia’s biennial integration into the city and amongst its people, is the importance of highlighting all aspects of culture to support contemporary identity proposals.

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, LTD., 1968), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Fowler, “The Making of Rosc (Or the Struggle to Succeed),” *Circa* no. 18 (Sep.-Oct., 1984), 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Ivo Mesquita's catalogue for the Twenty-eighth Bienal da São Paulo provides the closest analog to aid in the investigation of biennial manifestations and aims in Brazil. Organized as a discursive event, Mesquita increased the biennial activities, reduced the number of participating artists, eschewed traditional methods of classification and theory, and centered the event around the biennial model by mining São Paulo's surviving archives.<sup>23</sup> The curatorial team's implementation of a more dispersed biennial format that engages with different parts of the city, and consequently reaches the biennial's audience with more immediacy, they argue, more effectively establishes a conducive environment for the art to engage with the constituency's identities issues, a strategy employed by Bahia's curatorial team that will emerge in the section describing the Public Archives.<sup>24</sup>

Panos Kompatsiaris, writing as a contemporary biennial scholar, illustrates the contradictions in biennial goals that can arise within the specific context of an emerging biennial venue. Taking the Seventh Berlin Biennial as a case study, Kompatsiaris investigates the biennial from a social sciences perspective that employs an ethnographic methodology to reveal this event's

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<sup>23</sup> Ivo Mesquita, *28a Bienal Internacional de São Paulo: Em Vivo Contato (In Living Contact)* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2008), 16-18, 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

competing interests of “brand” legitimation and counter-discursive model.<sup>25</sup> Her methodology brings to light the embattled messages implicit to the biennial by analyzing the “relations between subjects and objects in the sites they appear and their conceptualizations within larger configurations of meaning.”<sup>26</sup> She finds the appropriation of the biennial model by the curators of the Seventh Berlin Biennial as a legitimating vehicle for their revisionary desires to present local alterities supported by the “noncensorship, freedom, and autonomy that the category of art enjoys in Western liberal societies.”<sup>27</sup> The Berlin Biennial’s particular use to serve the host city’s provocative ends supplies this study with a valuable hypothesis for the motivations urging the adoption of the biennial in a new location.

In Thierry de Duve’s work, the biennial represents an economic pawn, in this case, for both the global art market and the local city.<sup>28</sup> The insertion of the global art market, in the guise of the art biennial, in various local cities around the world legitimizes new markets for art consumption by broadening the criteria for recognizable art to virtually any cultural product under its powerful

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<sup>25</sup> Panos Kompatsiaris, “Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7, issue 1 (03/2014), 84.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>28</sup> Thierry de Duve, “The Glocal and the Singuniversal,” *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (November, 2007), 682-683. Thierry de Duve creates the term, ‘glocal,’ to describe the insertion of the global market at the level of local consumption that successfully meets the needs of local interests.

umbrella.<sup>29</sup> As contemporary biennials increasingly intervene into the built environment of host city and rely less on traditional art displays than activities, Thierry de Duve's hypothesis concerning the biennial's legitimating weight elaborates the definitive characteristics of the event's form to virtually any site the curatorial team claims.

The two-volume work, *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, stands as the most comprehensive text on biennial scholarship collected and assembled from contributors located around the world, the leading scholars of the field.<sup>30</sup> Gathered in conjunction with the Bergen Biennial Conference of the same year staged in lieu of a traditional art biennial, the essays compare the lofty ambitions behind the implementation of the most recognizable biennials against the results of the ensuing projects.<sup>31</sup>

The scholarship examining biennials assembled for this study examines this large-scale perennial exhibition format as a legitimating vehicle for the global aspirations of the cities that host them. This study located only a few sources that endeavored to uncover the specific contextual forces driving

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<sup>29</sup>Thierry de Duve, "The Glocal and the Singuniversal," *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (November, 2007), 686.

<sup>30</sup> Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo, eds., *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, vol. 1 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

particular cities to produce and stage biennials. As an exhibition format carrying recurrent potential alluded to in the etymology of the term, many recent biennial scholars encourage the investigation into, and creation of, particular biennial genealogies. As biennials increasingly appear in particular locales unfamiliar to the traditional art market, ascertaining each biennial's identity provides valuable information about the area as a producer of contemporary art, but perhaps more importantly, how the locale would like to be perceived by its audiences. This anthology provides several strong instances within its collection of essays showing a connection between biennial stagings and identity revisions or solidifications, the overarching theme this study finds at work in the third Bahian manifestation.

### **Biennial Studies: A Brief History of the Biennial Model**

Even before the modern biennial resolved into the form viewers recognize today, the mega-display forum for art was a privatized affair staged as the European Art Salon. As ancestor to the biennial, the annual art exhibitions, like the French Salon formulated in 1737 and the series inaugurated by the English Royal Academy begun in 1768, led an exhibiting movement for European societies.<sup>32</sup> By 1893, Venice would emerge on the fledging art circuit map

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<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: The New York Graphic Society LTD., 1968), 35-36.

spearheaded by Riccardo Selvatico, the Mayor of the City of Venice.<sup>33</sup> At the close of the nineteenth century, as nations competed to differentiate themselves and assert a distinctive national identity, Selvatico recognized an opportunity to promote Venice as a cultural repository to the world, and he chose art as the cultural product. The municipality designed the project to be national in scope and exhibit art “without distinction of the country of origin.”<sup>34</sup>

For the site of the Selvatico’s exhibition, the municipality set aside Venice’s public garden, the Giardini with an ambition to raise Venice to the level of the world’s cities by consolidating and presenting examples of high art (fig. 5).<sup>35</sup> In 1895, Venice hosted the first of its biennials within the Palazzo dell’Esposizione, a neoclassical building collaboratively designed by the Venetian City Council’s architects, Enrico Trevisanato and Marius De Maria.<sup>36</sup> With the completion of the construction of the exhibition venue during the winter of 1894-1895, the “First International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice” opened its doors to 224,000 visitors, and amended its original plan to include international as well as Italian artists (fig. 6).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: The New York Graphic Society LTD., 1968), 76-77.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

<sup>36</sup> La Biennale di Venezia, “From the Beginnings until the Second World War,” *La Biennale di Venezia* <http://www.labiennale.org/en/biennale/history/vb1.html?back=true> (accessed October 1, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Though later editions of the Venice Biennale grew to include satellite pavilions to the Palazzo dell'Esposizione to accommodate artists of other nations, the first five editions bounded all displayed art to the single pavilion. With international artists grouped together within the same structure, Alloway describes the viewer's motion through the gallery as an "analogue of nineteenth-century internationalism."<sup>38</sup> But with the dramatic architecture of Venice populating the background and remnants of its singular culture infiltrating the biennial's character, special commissioners were appointed in future editions to design national or thematic shows which ultimately contributed to the Biennale's increasingly nationalistic character later.<sup>39</sup>

The national pavilions to follow erected by each participating country presented various architectural styles announcing the self-image of the nation represented inside.<sup>40</sup> In terms of the Venice Biennale's structure, organized and experienced much like a museum or super salon, the specialized exhibition space set off from the rest of the city within the Giardini gardens depicted a fictive space depicting national tastes.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the Biennale's reputation as a disseminator of national tastes and the nature of each country's production, the

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: The New York Graphic Society LTD., 1968), 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



exhibition also served as a transmitter of information about artists and trends in artistic production.

After World War II, the Venice Biennale's format developed to include more national pavilions, and the presentation of other arts like film and works by the avant-garde reflecting to support a broadening, tourist audience and their economic impact of historical cities.<sup>42</sup> For the twentieth century, the biennial's promotional acumen extended into the realm of the city, drawing attention to the "famous architecture, recurrent festivals, and tourist industries" until the city itself transformed into a medium.<sup>43</sup> But by the mid-1980's marginalized artists in peripheral locales outside the Western art world began to question the political and rhetorical mechanisms exercised by the West to enforce their hegemony, and so the Third World altered the biennial model to communicate ideas for their own reality. While the contained, stratified Venice Biennale model with its cluster of pavilions neatly bounded by nation-state represented internationalism from a Western perspective, the following discussion of the contrary Cuban biennial model attests to model's transformation as an important factor in supporting identity construction from a local perspective. A brief discussion of Cuba's landmark 1980's biennial productions is needed to establish the link

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<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (Greenwich: The New York Society LTD., 1968), 114.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

between biennial form and the earliest ruminations on self-identifying this study believes to be at play in the third Bahian biennial.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Cuba reinvented itself as an autonomous creative force on the international stage, spearheading the presentation of Third-World artistic production as a distinctive, diversified voice in the global art world. The transformation in Cuba's historical context ripened conditions for this counter-discursive biennial iteration, not only to propose post-colonial identities for itself, but to revise the essentializing narratives forced upon former colonial peripheries. For the hosts of contemporary biennials emerging on the global art circuit, the large-scale exhibition format and its promise of international attention presented itself as a persuasive option to position their distinct post-colonial identities through display of their cultural production:

In 1984, the imperial enemy was a real and present danger; the Biennial was a platform for resistance and self-identification as much as a showcase for the contributions of Latin American artists to regional and international modern and contemporary art. From a more narrow art historical perspective, the Biennial was without historical precedent in its diversity, scale and exclusive focus on Latin American art. . .<sup>44</sup>

Gerardo Mosquera, curator of the 1984 Havana Biennial framed the project from the perspective of Latin American artists segregated or

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<sup>44</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill, "Becoming Global: Contemporary Art Worlds in the Age of the Biennials Boom," (PhD diss., New York University, 2013), 268.

disproportionally represented at the mega-exhibitions, like Documenta and the Venice Biennial (fig. 7).<sup>45</sup> So while the Venice Biennale dominated the art world for nearly three quarters of the twentieth century, the Havana Biennials restructured the biennial's form and possibilities for the manifestations circulated after them: labels for works omitted the producer's country of origin, the biennial venues engaged with the entirety of the city abandoning Venice's centralized plan, and by inviting artists to install their own works, the Havana Biennial anticipated in an early form the discursive propensity of contemporary editions.<sup>46</sup>

Contemporary biennials responding to the post-colonial context in which they operate propose new aspects of the biennial format to redefine their positions within the contemporary landscape (both art and political) and their engagement with the world. Curatorial emphasis after the Havana Biennials of the 1980s increasingly elaborated on post-colonialism, specifically their constituency's engagement with contemporaneity and modernity, by means of spreading discursive activities throughout the city, no longer just art displays. Moreover, art displays wiped away the residue of Western art history's

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<sup>45</sup> Hakan Topal, "Negotiating Urban Space: Contemporary Art Biennials and the Case of New Orleans," (PhD diss., New School of Social Research of the New School, May 2012), 98-99.

<sup>46</sup> Rafal Niemojewski, "Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial," *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, vol. 1 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 97.

propensity to classify by leaving out identifying information of artworks that created a favorable climate for valuations and creations of hierarchy.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Literature of the Third Biennial of Bahia**

People clinging to their own heritages, traditions, languages, and styles of selfhood insist that they be written into history as themselves, and that their picture of us, with elements we might not relish, be written into that history too. Even more, they demand that they will write the history.

-Thomas McEvelley<sup>48</sup>

“É Tudo Nordeste? (Is Everything Northeast?)” governed the themes and form of the Third Bienal da Bahia from May 29 to September 7, 2014. With the expanse of forty-six years between the second and third editions, the timing reflected significant developments in the context of the region that the authors of the biennial acknowledged as contributive to their decision to organize the exhibition project. Antonio Albino Canelas Rubim, the Secretary of Culture of the State of Bahia, explains,

Since the Lula administration, significant changes have occurred in the Northeast and in Brazil. Unlike previous moments, the region has greater development today when compared to other regions in Brazil. This Northeast in motion, with dilemmas and tensions

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<sup>47</sup> Joe Martin Lin-Hill, “Becoming Global: Contemporary Art Worlds in the Age of the Biennials Boom,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013), 47-48.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas McEvelley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1992), 132.

inherent to the process of changes, invents new and contemporary territorial dynamics, human experiences and cultural creations.<sup>49</sup>

The programming of the Third Bienal da Bahia also memorializes the fiftieth anniversary of the 1964 military coup of the Brazilian government, a censored period in Brazilian and Bahian history that prematurely closed the 1968 Bahian Biennial.<sup>50</sup> The confluence of increasing economic prosperity, landmark anniversaries in the nation and region's history, and the saturation of democratization sweeping the country with Direct Elections necessitated a repositioning of the region in relation to national and global flows of information and economic and political changes.<sup>51</sup> With this desire in mind, the biennial curatorial team appropriated the city and surrounding territory as its medium in numerous spaces and diverse ways other than expected white-cube art displays to place "culture firmly in the spotlight."<sup>52</sup>

In contemporary biennials, the model dons the guise and mannerisms of a social actor by its placement firmly within the social realm of the city, opening up "spaces for artistic and intellectual dialogue and interventions" with a

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<sup>49</sup> Antonio Albino Canelas Rubim, "3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial: Memory and Creation," in *Journal of 100 Days: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial* (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, May 29-September 7, 2014) [http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_) (accessed October 1, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

distinctly local flair.<sup>53</sup> Like the contemporary biennials described by Topal, Bahia's Biennial interacted with the whole city, beyond traditional museum venues, to reveal the cultural production and identities of the entirety of the region, not just official histories. Working against the region's timeless, colonial identity devised for and by tourism centered in the Pelourinho neighborhood populated by vendors in traditional dress as the face of Bahia, the curators moved the venues out of the center of the city and as far as the "backlands" to extend beyond traditionality. The Feira de São Joaquim (the open-air market) played host to a free art fair curated by Marc Pottier erected in a stall within the public market, which encouraged genuine, spontaneous meetings between artists and the community (fig. 8).<sup>54</sup> Forty-nine other sites around the city and surrounding state such as the São Bento Monastery, the Public Archives, and the Terreiro Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá (a religious Candomblé community) hosted biennial activities that mined and presented fictions and realities identifiable with the space.<sup>55</sup>

To recreate the historical context of the Third Bienal da Bahia's moment and that of the intervening years between the second and third editions that it built upon, the biennial curatorial team published six issues of *Contorno*

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<sup>53</sup> Hakan Topal, "Negotiating Urban Space: Contemporary Art Biennials and the Case of New Orleans," (PhD diss., New School of Social Research of the New School, May 2012), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, *Bienal da Bahia: Map of Programming for the Second Season*, Map (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

magazine to compile historical documents and interview transcripts of the founding members of the 1966 and 1968 Bahian Biennials (fig. 9). As the explanatory texts for the biennial activities staged during the third edition, the collection reads without the heavy pontifications of theory-driven research, instead seeking new inroads into knowledge collection focused on the value of memory of participants to recreate the ‘spirit’ of the projects.<sup>56</sup>

The *raison d’être* of the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, the hosting institution of the Third Bienal da Bahia, upheld the original mission of the museum championed by its first director, Lina Bo Bardi, in the first issue of *Contorno* (fig. 10). A passionate advocate of the Northeast, of Bahia, Bardi collected and exhibited cultural objects of Bahia’s popular culture alongside fine art to equate the idea of the “everyday man” embodied in utilitarian objects with the state’s identity.<sup>57</sup> *Contorno* reporters outlined Bardi’s museum objectives for cultural appreciation of the Northeast through large exhibitions like, “Northeastern Exhibition,” staged to coincide with the restoration of the museum grounds begun in 1962-1963. It showcased Bardi’s popular art collection alongside paintings, carvings, and drawings contributed by fifty-seven

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<sup>56</sup> The Curatorial Team, “About the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial,” in *Journal of 100 Days: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial* (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, May 29-September 7, 2014) [http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_) (accessed October 1, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, “MAM, the Other and a Biennial for Bahia,” in *Journal of 100 Days: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial* (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, May 29-September 7, 2014) [http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_) (accessed October 1, 2015), preface.

artists from the northeastern states of Recife, Ceará, and Bahia (fig. 11).<sup>58</sup> As the host institution for the Third Bienal da Bahia, MAM-BA recognizes the influence of Bardi's foundational mission for the museum as a guiding principle for the current biennial, recounting in the *Journal of 100 Days* published in conjunction with the project,

The role of the museum was creating a movement that would search for its roots in the past while at the same time developing actions in the present, being historical and current, a movement of recognizing and valuing the living memory of the popular art of the Northeast.<sup>59</sup>

Under Bardi's leadership and vision, exhibitions created an identity of the Northeast by asserting the region's autonomy and distinctiveness, through the display of its artistic production, in response to the widespread application of national development policies.<sup>60</sup> The first issue of *Contorno* magazine also recovered the essentializing, homogenous identity (sustained by fictions of traditionality) of Bahia's artistic production of the 1960's and 1970's as viewed from central positions in southern Brazil, like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In an interview with Chico Liberato, an important artist and a member of the first and second Bahian Biennials, characterizes the reception of Bahia's modern art

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<sup>58</sup> Carla Zollinger, "Museum of Popular Culture and Modern Art of Unhão," in *Ah, Que Essa Bahia Tem Me Consumido (Oh, Bahia has Been Consuming Me)* (Salvador: *Contorno/01*, November 2013), 62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



production during this period as “regional modern.”<sup>61</sup> Wishing to participate in the Western modern art movements informing the artistic production of the country, Bahian artists infused modern art’s formalism with Bahian traditional subject matter.

The second *Contorno* issue printed prior to the Third Bienal da Bahia continued the contextual-recovery mission of the Bahian art climate around the time of the first and second biennials proposed in the first issue. Building on the interviews compiled in the first issue, *Contorno* enhanced the contextual picture relayed by the testimony of the interviewees by gathering more interviews regarding the picture of Bahian artistic production in the period surrounding the first two biennials. Sante Scaldaferrri, another practicing artist from the period illustrates Bahia’s varied artistic production, straddling the modern art movements flooding Brazil and the residues of traditional culture that characterize the capital.<sup>62</sup> As the major art institution (MAM-BA) in Salvador steered by Lina Bo Bardi’s advocacy for the presence of the regional character in Bahian artistic production in the 1960’s, created an official image of Bahian art grounded in Bahian history. As Bo Bardi stated:

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<sup>61</sup> Almandrade, “Conceptual Art and the Bahia of Traditions,” in *Ah, Que Essa Bahia Tem Me Consumido (Oh, Bahia has Been Consuming Me)* (Salvador: *Contorno/01*, November 2013), 72-73.

<sup>62</sup> Cátia Milena Albuquerque, “Toward a New Golden Age in Bahian,” in *Na Media do Impossível (As Far as is Humanly Possible)* (Salvador: *Contorno/02*, December 2013), 73.

An aesthetic expression, when valid, is universal cultural heritage, and all the more universal when defined by its national and provincial characteristics.<sup>63</sup>

Speaking for artistic practice today, artists Carol Barreto, Laila Rosa, and Duron Jackson confront hegemonic discourse and its totalizing social representations with suspicion. Regarding Diasporas of people and ideas as the primary agent in shaping contemporary reality, their work problematizes rigid identities through the “deconstruction of hegemonic discourses” and their manifestations in society using media like fashion, visual arts, and music to propose multiple subjectivities for people today in their collaborative project for the *Federal University of Bahia* and MAM-BA’s extension course.<sup>64</sup> As contributing artists to the Third Bienal da Bahia, the thrust of their deconstructive art practice described in artist statements for *Contorno’s* third issue supported the post-colonial stance of Bahia’s curatorial in their approach to the decentralization of the biennial organization, emphasis on discursive activities acquired through egalitarian encounters and knowledge production, and recovery and presentation of forgotten/omitted voices. By surveying exhibitions from Bahia’s

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<sup>63</sup> Lina Bo Bardi, “Technique and Art,” in *Na Media do Impossível (As Far as is Humanly Possible)* (Salvador: *Contorno/02*, December 2013), 88 relates Lina Bo Bardi’s proposal for the “Concrete Design” exhibition and the desirable qualities of the participating artists that utilize modern art trends from a Brazilian perspective.

<sup>64</sup> Carol Barreto, Laila Rosa, and Duron Jackson, “Diaspora through the Visual Arts, Fashion and Music,” in *Contorno/03: Quem Viaja Arrisca (Every Journey Made is a Risk Taken)* (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, February 2014), 69.

past, like the “Northeast Exhibition” and the first two biennials as recounted by participants, the transition from Bahia’s image as a preserve of Brazilian traditional culture steeped in history to a contemporary, multifaceted one in the third biennial emerges.

The *Journal of 100 Days* published and compiled over each day of the biennial’s duration, treats each page as a documentary snapshot of the particular encounters and practices that occurred for each day’s programming (fig. 12). Instead of rigorous, theory-driven reviews of the artistic practice and works gathered within the project, the journal presents the relationship created between the works, the sites, and the audience as an archive for the Third Bienal da Bahia.

### **The Public Archives: Understanding Bahia’s Biennial Exhibition Model**

One of the things that the Biennale has to its advantage is its inclusion in the city, in the context of Bahia. I’m touring the city and seeing the Biennale all along it. When I came here in 2002, there was no contact between the lives of the artists and the city. And this time I had the opportunity to immerse myself, visiting institutions that I did not know of, and see the other places where the Biennale is present. I find Salvador much more active artistically; and there is now a different spirit here. This has to do with the Biennale, and it seems to me that it is a model of Biennale that should be replicated in many other places. Because of one of the problems that biennales have, is that almost always the biennale is identified with the name of the city and yet it has nothing to do with the city. It’s more like a UFO that lands in the city and then takes off and goes away, and it is perhaps seen as a curiosity, as a spectacle, but the city does not participate.

-Gerardo Mosquera<sup>65</sup>

The sentiment expressed by Gerardo Mosquera about the dislocation between the biennial's art and the host city mirrors the tradition of contemporary biennial practice to bring international issues to local contexts without translating them to meet local needs.<sup>66</sup> However, repetition of biennials within the same locale create an opportunity for "historical reflection" whereby the project can reference "its own past by actively making comparisons," as the Third Bienal da Bahia has done between the second and third editions. The curators leading these projects, much as one would in a museum setting, have the opportunity to investigate "local histories and contexts, though always in terms of their possible relationship to the presumed internationalist horizon" as a means to practice historical revisionism often concluding with questioning the hegemonic mechanisms guiding artistic modernity.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Gerardo Mosquera, *Journal of 100 Days: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bahia Biennial* (Salvador: Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, May 29-September 7, 2014) [http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bahiamam/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_) (accessed October 1, 2015), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Hakan Topal, "Negotiating Urban Space: Contemporary Art Biennials and the Case of New Orleans," (PhD diss., New School for Social Research of the New School, May 2012), 85. The author describes a lack of consciousness between contemporary biennials and the genealogy preceding them admitting, "Although they are mostly repeated every other year, biennials are usually organized as one-time events. Each edition is entirely different from any other."

<sup>67</sup> Carlos Basualdo, "The Unstable Institution (2003)," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, vol. 1 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 132.

Under the guise of the biennial, the city and its context on display gain legitimacy at the national and international level.<sup>68</sup> Whereas the Venice Biennale contributed to the “positivity of the social:” the mythologizing presentation of whole, self-contained audiences sharing essential qualities and shared agencies through homogenous displays of art in the promotion of nation-states, biennials today, complicated by globalization’s provisions of immediate access to information, argue for the opposite. In the post-modern biennial, identities of place are as complex, multiple, and contradictory, as the variation of its local audiences, and it is the individual constructions of place and the practices that accomplish this that must be investigated.<sup>69</sup>

To engage with regional Bahian identity as it is understood or lived by every stratus of local society, the overall organization of Bahia’s biennial sites extended throughout the region beyond the capital, and lasted for one hundred days to enable wide participation and critical self-reflexivity as Bahians live with it. The intentional placement of biennial venues outside the expected tourist draws, as in the colonial era Pelourinho neighborhood in the heart of old Salvador, attests to the curatorial team’s concern that local Bahian residents be

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<sup>68</sup> Panos Kompatsiaris, “Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7, no. 1 (03/2014), 78.

<sup>69</sup> Simon Sheikh, “Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility: Questions for the Biennial,” in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, vol. 1 of *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 157.

invested in contributing meaningful aspects of local identity from a self-authored perspective. Some of these biennial sites, included installations at open-air food markets and community churches likely frequented by residents that do not regularly interface with the art world in spaces, and are therefore not conditioned by it. Unlike other biennials intent to engage with an international audience, the third biennial of Bahia seemed to specifically focus its resources toward a local audience by staffing the exhibition sites with Portuguese-speaking mediators and limited informative texts. With a high rate of illiteracy in Bahia and a fledgling art market presence kept afloat by MAM-BA (but overshadowed by the international presence of major cities in southern Brazil), the overall curatorial decision to omit large, sometimes expensive exhibition supplementary texts or informative object labels strictly guided by restrictive curatorial themes in favor of in-person discussions, lent a democratic air to biennial production and regional identity debate.

As one such site outside traditional art spaces, but important as a carrier of local knowledge, the Public Archives illustrates the democratic character of the third biennial and the overall curatorial advocacy of a meaningful regional identity constructed internally as opposed to being led by interpretations of whitewashed, tourist locations composed by an international audience.

Although I, the author, did not represent what I believe to be the biennial's

intended visitor, my critical analysis of the site by means of describing my personal experience of the venue and art displayed within, serves to prove this study's interpretation of the Bahia's third biennial as a democratic exercise in proposing various, local identities constructed by residents.

As an international visitor, access to the Public Archives was difficult and strictly proscribed to certain times during the week and day. To visit required a lengthy, special bus trip helmed by a Portuguese-speaking mediator presumably narrating the background of the biennial project there and the building's history. The Portuguese narration and the venue's distance from Salvador's center catered less to the foreign visitor typical of biennials than to Bahian residents living in the neighborhood or those involved and familiar with this venue's inaccessibility enough to realize special transportation was needed to arrive there.

Once at the site, special guidance throughout the building and its art displays by mediators provided explanation and discussion of the work when called upon, allowing a certain amount of individualized engagement, but at the same time, the prevalent tour-like experience belied the biennial's expectations of attendance by even the least-sophisticated art viewer (fig. 13, 14). A broad stone fence obscured the colonial building's façade hidden further by its lie on a side road, made even more so illegible without any notable signage announcing its

presence beyond the gate or leading to it from the road. Once corralled into a tour group by the mediator on duty for that particular day outside the left arcade of the building, the mediator led the visitors into the building via a doorway to an interior stairwell to the most-populated art room on the second story, or by an exterior staircase to the same room (fig. 15).

The main room, as the rest of the building, remained open to the outside without artificial lighting of any kind overhead, which allowed the sounds, smells, and landscape of the city to mingle with the artworks (fig. 16). The resultant works of artistic responses were on display in equal number and without special designation distinguishing them from objects chosen from the various local archival and museum collections mined for the project. The overall effect of the display and the mediators' personal transmissions of their experiences of the project traded the official, specialized interpretation of Bahian history contained in the collections' objects for a revisionist, personal lived history from a local perspective.

In the first half of the room before Rodrigo Matheus's work, "*Amparo Refletido (Protection Reflected)*," (a three dimensional installation of mirrors mounted on scaffolding) Pato grouped artists' works and archival material into three sections: "Anthropology of the Negro," "Anthropology of the Bandit," and "Anthropology of Estácio de Lima (fig. 17)." The first section included an



undated oil painting entitled, “Baiana,” executed by a twentieth-century Brazilian painter, Di Cavalcanti. He depicted an idealized portrait of a traditional Baiana woman- of mixed or African descent with her hair wrapped in the recognizable white headkerchief made famous by street vendors in the historic Pelourinho district (fig. 18). In two works, contemporary Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth gathered wood, lime, and skulls into a display cabinet entitled, “*Caixa com Crânios (Box with Skulls)*,” and a second work entitled, “*Bala e Curativos (Bullets and Dressings)*,” which gathered together objects of the same title name, both pieces recalling misinformed pathologies linking race and poor behaviors and violent uprisings. Juarez Paraíso, an important local artist with the bulk of his career in the twentieth century, contributed a photo-design piece from 1985 entitled “*Violência (Violence)*.” Three mid-twentieth-century photo-journal works by renowned photographer and ethnographer of Afro-Atlantic religions, Pierre Verger depicting ritual objects completed the display section alongside “*Jogos e Costumes (Games and Customs)*,” an artbook created by Brazilian photographer, Eustáquio Neves.

The second section collected together works taking the popular hinterland bandit figure of the Brazilian northeast interior organized by São Paulon artist, Ícaro Lira. While historical government stances against the poor people from this area espoused during this period framed them as outlaws, Lira’s vision of

the works themselves illuminates the heroic cast of these bandit-figures to those living in this geographic area outside the coastal political center. Works include a film from 1936-1937 by Benjamin Abrahão about a historical twentieth-century bandit group massacred by police, an assemblage of nineteenth-century photographs of the dissident backland settlement known as Canudos destroyed by the Brazilian military by Flávio de Barros, and a charcoal drawing from 1994 by Juraci Dórea entitled "*Ecce Homo 10 (Behold the Man 10)*," presumably depicting two armed bandits (fig. 13).

On the other side of the scaffolding piece by Matheus, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's installation evoked the aftermath of a pseudo-Afro-Brazilian religious ritual suggested by the linen-covered organic offerings laid along the floor, above and around which wooden pedestals interred various other liquid and solid offerings (fig. 19). The wall immediately behind Campos-Pons's installation supported three works on paper depicting the portraits of the figurines mounted alongside them (fig. 20). In the vestibule around the corner immediately preceding a stairwell to the old colonial-era kitchen Pato installed the third section, "*Anthropology of Estácio de Lima.*" As one descends the stairs, the visitor encountered three pictures of portraits of well-suited men with lead wrappings masking their gazes placed above their line of sight (fig. 21). Staged by artist José Rufino, two of the three likenesses are identified as Nina Rodrigues

and Oscar Freire (labelled so in the non-obligatory paper maps stacked near the archive's entrance), the seminal teacher and disciple figures in the field of anthropology and medicine in Bahia. The legacy of their careers ultimately facilitated the preservation of objects that now constitute the Estácio de Lima collection.

As the main exhibition space at the Public Archives and the area with which I have the most experience, this study now takes the two works by Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and the altered portraits by José Rufino as case studies for the biennial's larger revisionist themes regarding Bahian identity. Under Ana Pato's urging, the artists engaged with local history preserved in these collections, and presumably also from their own experiences gathered from any amount of time spent there during research and installation. Pato's project housed at the Public Archives supported the biennial's goals to democratically produce Bahia's contemporary identity, which could then be rejected, accepted, or debated by local visitors bringing to bear their various perspectives and experiences on the exhibition's messages issued by the artwork.

Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's installation, "*Conversando a Situ/Acted (Talking on Site/Acted)*," brings an artistic representation of a fictive Afro-Brazilian religion into the legitimating space of the archive and the exhibition. Much maligned until the twentieth century as a collection of corrupted rituals practiced

only by slaves and descendants of slaves, Afro-Brazilian religions, Candomblé being one of the most popular in Brazil and Bahia in particular, experienced relentless police persecution during its history much like the ritual objects confiscated and housed in the Estácio de Lima collection. The Estácio de Lima Museum Collection contains objects, ritual implements, weapons, legal documents, and even preserved body parts amassed until the museum's closure under Estácio de Lima's stewardship in 1967.<sup>70</sup>

Originally the objects belonged to the Museum of Anthropology and Legal Medicine founded by Nina Rodrigues's, the founder of 'Legal Medicine' in Bahia's Faculty of Medicine for higher education. He gathered together ritual implements, heads of famous criminals, and objects of phrenological analysis to support the institution's study of pathology. The collection was inherited by Rodrigues's successors in the chair of Legal Medicine, which subsequently grew as it continued to acquire cult objects seized by police.<sup>71</sup> For Campos-Pons to generally represent Afro-Brazilian religions with an artistic interpretation of the offering act present in many ritual ceremonies within the legitimating space of an archive credited with holding official histories, she sanctions the popular practice of Afro-Brazilian religions.

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<sup>70</sup> Roger Sansi-Roca, "The Hidden Life of Stones: Historicity, Materiality and the Value of Candomblé Objects in Bahia," *Journal of Material Culture* 10 (2005), 145-146.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

Five figurines from the collections resonated with the artist, so Campos-Pons reimagined the dolls on paper as active people with fully functioning bodies, sometimes dressed in new clothing, and with tools to perform different occupations. As is expected with their traditional roles as figurines or dolls, any actions these objects could perform require the outside forces of human hands manipulating them. When Campos-Pons interpreted the figures on paper, captured in the performance of some action committed under their own volition, the figures became agents of their own history to each viewer thereafter. Under the guise of the biennial's revisionist and democratic goals, to put the power of Bahia's contemporary moment within the authorship of Bahian biennial visitors, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's works on paper stand as a collective metaphor in promotion of Bahian agency in the region's self-determination within a global context.

In a similar way to Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons's works on paper, José Rufino's masked portraits in the stairwell of the Public Archives illustrated the local visitor's authority to identify oneself. Instead of the visitor becoming the object of the portrait subject's gaze, Rufino's decision to obscure the gazes of the painted men (significantly depicting historical Bahian figures who made it their life's work to take Bahia and its people as objects of their study) inverted the power struggle between object and subject. The result of Rufino's intervention

into the archive collection completely empowered the traditional subject (i.e. the viewer beheld by the portrait), to view their Bahian history as objects embodied in the portraitized figures of Nina Rodrigues and Oscar Freire to accept, reject, or reshape according to their own personal histories. By repositioning these confiscated cultural objects from the negative, specialized domain of a criminology museum to an archive used to preserve knowledge, issues of official and unofficial histories, and by extension, questions of idealized identities, permeated the installation.

For Lucy Lippard, art carries the ability to help society focus on places and place-making practices, “how their topography and every detail reflects and generates memory and a certain kind of knowledge about nature and culture.”<sup>72</sup> While scholars usually place the agency in the realm of culture to define a place, Lippard argues that place equally impacts our definitions of self-hood, or identity.<sup>73</sup> In today’s artistic practice related to place-making, artists often assume the role of storyteller-mediator who unearths or makes connections between the locale and its influence on the beliefs of the community.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 287.

Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational*

*Identity*, unpacks general steps assumed by the artist propositioned by institutions to create site-specific art.

The increasing institutional interest in current site-oriented practices that mobilize the site as a discursive narrative is demanding an intensive physical mobilization of the artist to create works in various cities throughout the cosmopolitan world. Typically, an artist (no longer studio-bound object maker; primarily working now on call) is invited by an art institution to produce a work specifically configured for the framework provided by the institution. . . Subsequently, the artist enters into a contractual agreement with the host institution for the commission. There follow repeated visits to or extended stays at the site; research into particularities of the institution and/or city within which it is located. . . consideration of the parameters of the exhibition itself. . . and many meetings with curators, educators, and administrative support staff, who may all end up 'collaborating' with the artist to produce the work.<sup>75</sup>

Kwon also corroborates the artist's role to extract histories contrary to dominant culture to satisfy thematic agendas, in the case of the Public Archives, the effect of history engendered in the place of the state to shape regional identity and a questioning of the validity of the monolithic traditional image of Bahia in the national and international consciousness.

Site-specificity at play in the Public Archives venue of the Third Bienal da Bahia supports the collective questioning of the state's regional and international

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<sup>75</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 46.

place given by the biennial's theme. It provides a distinction of place by showcasing the project within Bahia's built environment, exploiting the city as a cultural product as much as the collective display of art from multiple generations of Bahia's artists.<sup>76</sup> The art then created in the context of the site under the banner of biennial, transfers its legitimacy to the site itself redefining the alternative histories carried in the cultural products of the Estácio de Lima Museum Collection into newly authentic bearers of a richer identity of Bahia supplied by the participation of Bahia's constituency. This reading of artists' power in the site-specific process hinges on the notion of the viewer's acceptance of their authority, in being able to conflate the artists' identity with the 'othering' identity of the marginalized identity of the cultural objects in the collection.<sup>77</sup> I argue that the biennial project's reclamation of the Public Archives (thus bestowing its legitimacy, i.e. authenticity) coupled with the mixture of local with international artists creates a favorable environment for this acceptance to occur. This sanctioning by a local authority, i.e. MAM-BA and the institution of the biennial, confers authority on the artist to engage locals in the "production of their (self-) representation."<sup>78</sup> The alternative identities raised by this site-specific

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<sup>76</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 54-55.

<sup>77</sup> Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in *The Return of the Real*, 302-309 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 302.

<sup>78</sup> Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in *The Return of the Real*, 302-309 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996).



exhibition openly promoted and designed to engage local visitors creates an opportunity to contest and reshape the once official, closed identity contained and documented in the authoritative domains of archives and sanctioned systems of knowledge production. To continue this line of thought, Thomas McEvelley concludes, “The exhibited artwork, then, contains selfhood in a living and formative way as a set of implications and proposals,” to the viewer.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion

The project of the Third Bienal da Bahia was very much a negotiation of proposals for Bahia’s contemporary condition. Very conscious of the censorship of the first two Bahian biennials in the late 1960s and Bahia’s changing role in the national and international landscape economically, politically, and artistically, the topical conditions aligned to create an opportune environment for Bahia to redefine its identity as a “preserve of Brazilian traditional culture” in the national consciousness.

The Public Archives as a case study for the overall biennial project in Bahia, illustrates the curatorial team’s conscious decision to involve the city as support in their desire to question Bahia’s contemporary identity as an uninterrupted result of its history, and instead suggest the variation in Bahian

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 58.

identity proven in provided opportunities to empower and encourage all voices of Bahia to be heard in the project. The biennial's decentralized organization throughout fifty sites in the city and surrounding areas of Bahia, in addition to the emphasis on discursive practices like meetings, mediated tours, community readings, and preliminary magazines testifies to the propositional nature of the biennial's aim to begin to construct a biennial genealogy and revision of Bahia's identity that engages many perspectives- an identity as a lived history that is best created and contested by local Bahians.

To my knowledge, there has been no treatment published on the specific biennial genealogy being constructed in Bahia, particularly its distinctive Bahian biennial identity and the model's use by the curatorial team to generate a contemporary identity for the region from a local perspective. The biennial model is only one mechanism of globalization appropriated by emerging location's and their culture industries to assert a distinctive identity on the art circuit, and an examination of future Bahian biennials would clarify what aspects are shed or kept to support the state's national and international aims. In furthering this field of study, we can begin to understand how art is appropriated by post-colonial authors to assert self-authored identities in a continually enlarging world complicated by globalization's neo-colonial effect on emerging art markets or multi-national citizens. It is my hope this study has

only begun the study of Bahia's biennial genealogy and inserts Bahia's biennial story into the field of biennial studies.

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## Illustrations



Figure 1. 3<sup>rd</sup> Bienal da Bahia Publicity Sign. Courtesy of Author.



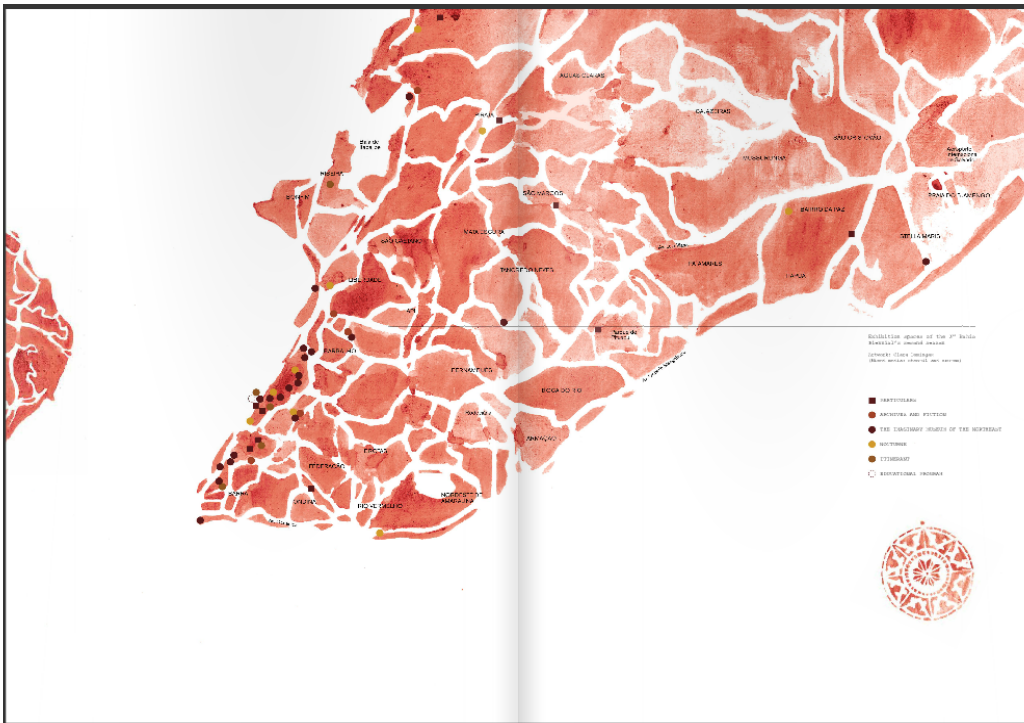


Figure 2. 3<sup>rd</sup> Bienal da Bahia Map of Venues, 2014. Courtesy of [http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_)



Figure 3. Ayrson Heráclito (far left) Marcelo Rezende (second from left); two of the three chief curators of the Third Bienal da Bahia. Courtesy of [http://www.artnexus.com/Notice\\_View.aspx?DocumentID=26923](http://www.artnexus.com/Notice_View.aspx?DocumentID=26923)



Figure 4. Ana Pato, Chief Curator (alongside Ayrson Heráclito and Marcelo Rezende) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bienal da Bahia. Courtesy of [bienaldabahia2014.com.br](http://bienaldabahia2014.com.br)



Figure 5. Palazzo dell'Esposizione in the Giardini Gardens of Venice, 1895.  
Courtesy of  
[www.labiennale.org/en/photocenter/photogallery\\_biennale.html?back=true](http://www.labiennale.org/en/photocenter/photogallery_biennale.html?back=true)



Figure 6. Poster advertising 1<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale. Courtesy of [venice11.umwblogs.org/a-brief-history-of-the-venice-biennale](http://venice11.umwblogs.org/a-brief-history-of-the-venice-biennale)



Figure 7. Cover of Catalogue for 1<sup>st</sup> Havana Biennial. Courtesy of <http://www.leftmatrix.com/havanab1.html>



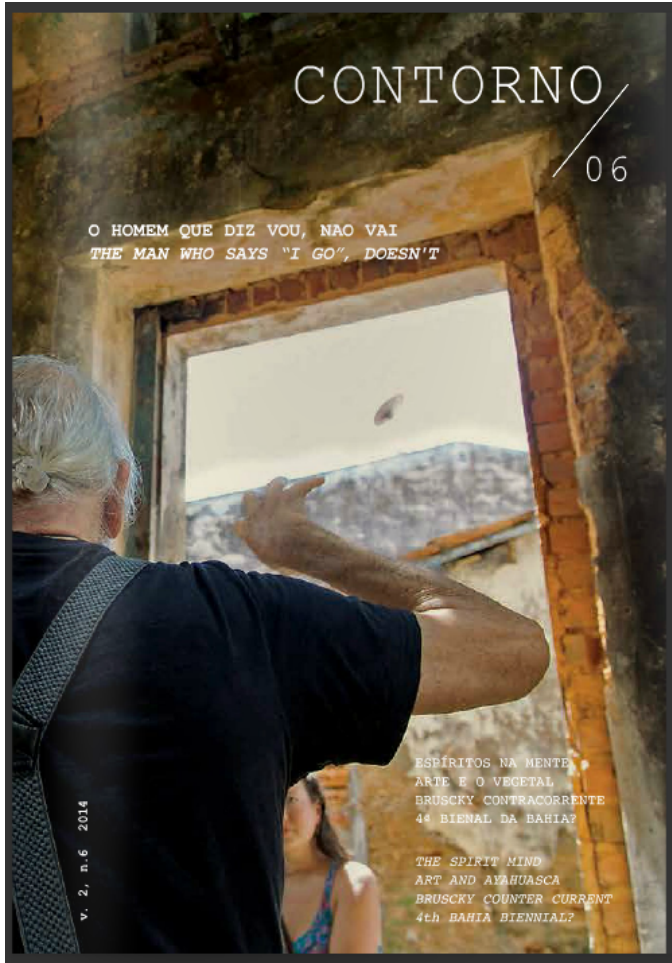


Figure 9. Cover of *Contorno/06*, printed for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bienal da Bahia. Courtesy of [http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/revista\\_contorno\\_6\\_](http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/revista_contorno_6_)





Figure 10. Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (Museum of Modern Art of Bahia (MAM-BA)). Courtesy of [www.bahia.ws](http://www.bahia.ws)



Figure 11. Lina Bo Bardi, "Northeast Civilization Exhibition," 1963. Courtesy of [http://cvisaacs.univalle.edu.co/crisisycritica/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=20&catid=9&limitstart=2](http://cvisaacs.univalle.edu.co/crisisycritica/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20&catid=9&limitstart=2)

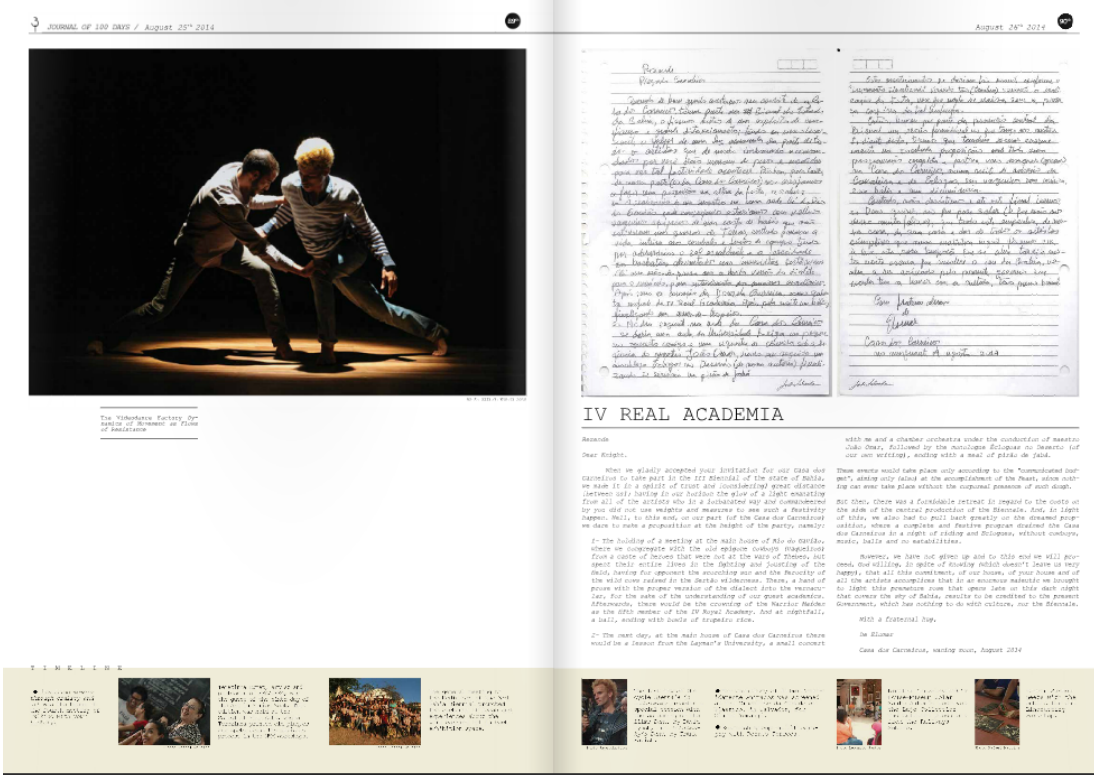


Figure 12. Pages 89 and 90 of the *Journal of 100 Days*. Courtesy of [http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/journal\\_of\\_100\\_days\\_-\\_issuu\\_](http://issuu.com/bienaldabahia/docs/journal_of_100_days_-_issuu_)



Figure 13. Mediators at the Public Archives exhibition venue stand by as biennial visitors experience the project. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 14. A mediator and Public Archives guard discuss an assemblage of objects together. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 15. Exterior staircase leading to the main space at the Public Archives.  
Courtesy of Author.



Figure 16. Detail of the open fenestration at the Public Archives with the view of Salvador beyond. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 17. Detail of the interior of the main exhibition space of the Public Archives with Rodrigo Matheus's installation, *Amparo Refletido*, at the center. Courtesy of Author.





Figure 18. Detail of the Public Archives main exhibition space with Di Cavalcanti's *Baiana*, undated. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 19. Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons and Neil Leonard, *Conversando a Situ/Acted*, sound and body performance, 2014. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 20. Dolls redrawn by Maria Magdalena Campos Pons for the Public Archives biennial project, 2014. Courtesy of Author.



Figure 21. José Rufino, *Jus abutendi 1* and *2*, lead foil on pictures of Nina Rodrigues and Oscar Freire, 2014. Courtesy of Author.