



SUPERPOSITION

Equilibrium & Engagement

16 March – 11 June, 2018

21st Biennale of Sydney

Art and globalisation

Art now takes part in the international circulation of tourism, trade, money and culture that is described as ‘globalisation’. The emergence of international late capitalism and the Western economic expansion of the 1980s was the backdrop for changing ideas about art, culture and exhibition display that are still being investigated all over the world.

During the 1980s there was a boom in the commercial art market (with big sales of contemporary work) at the same time as a significant shift in international exhibition practice: large museums began mounting blockbuster exhibitions, looking outside art-making practice for content, and moving away from the conventions of exhibitions that relied on a historical narrative or timeline display, and from survey shows of single artists.

This shift in museum practice was led by institutions such as Tate Modern, London and the Pompidou Centre, Paris, both known for developing new displays for their permanent collections devised according to thematic or conceptual investigations, not just the time and location in which the works were made. This approach is fundamental to an ongoing process of critical thinking about local and international artwork; it forms a significant part of the critical unpacking of Western narratives and frameworks for art, culture and history that have traditionally constructed and excluded other places, practices and points of view.

Alongside this shift within large cultural institutions, there was also a rapid expansion in the number of periodic exhibitions such as biennales. These exhibitions have several characteristics in common, including: engaging a different curator or curatorial team each time; a focus on recent or current work, often by living artists and often commissioned for the exhibition; an overarching set of concepts or curatorial ideas that frame large displays of diverse work; and installation across multiples sites or venues, often extending into other spaces in their host cities and regions.

Rapid developments in technology have increased the speed at which information and images circulate, expanding our access to artworks, exhibitions, platforms and cultural dialogues, even though access is still not available in the same ways for everyone in all places. The impact of this communication through digital media, and the accessibility of travel, has allowed artists and curators to collaborate more easily, shifting the focus away from art markets such as New York or London, and onto the many international exhibitions in places such as Sydney, São Paulo and Gwangju. Location has become both more and less important: distance is no longer a restriction or limitation to access and participation, and locality is a central focus for specific themes and discussions.

The Biennale of Sydney has often directly addressed the relationships between places, histories and ideas alongside the nature of display, participation and reception.