

## **Manifesta 8 press, 2010**

At the close of 2010, O'Grady was in Manifesta 8, the roving European Biennial of Contemporary Art, in Murcia, Spain. In a show whose failures raised more interesting questions than its successes, the location of her piece may have interrogated the curators' intentions.

by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, Sam Steverlynck, Louise O'Hare, 2010

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### **Three articles on Manifesta 8**

The full PDF contains copies of three of the more interesting and informative reviews of *Manifesta 8*, the biennial's 2010 edition, at several sites in the Region of Murcia, Spain, including the capital Murcia, and the port city Cartagena. Of the three articles, two are in English and one in Dutch with English translation. . . and two have mentions of O'Grady's work and one does not. The three are:

- a. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Manifesta 8: off-topic but riveting exhibitions." In *The National*, Arts & Culture, Oct 22, 2010. A long review by an art writer based in Lebanon, written for Abu Dhabi's primary English-language daily aimed at the UAE and Middle East. Article has only one illustration, "Sisters III" from the *Miscegenated Family Album* installation. Calls O'Grady's work "a revelation." Online at: <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/manifesta-8-off-topic-but-riveting-exhibitions>
- b. Sam Steverlynck, "Bericht uit Murcia en Cartagena: Manifesta 8." *Nieuws, Festivals, kunstbeeld.nl*. Sharply critical review, profusely illustrated, for a Dutch internet magazine. Includes O'Grady in a group of four artists "[whose beautiful work does] not succeed in saving Manifesta 8." Online at:

[http://www.kunstbeeld.nl/nl/nieuws/14527/Bericht\\_uit\\_Murcia\\_en\\_Cartagena:\\_Manifesta\\_8.html](http://www.kunstbeeld.nl/nl/nieuws/14527/Bericht_uit_Murcia_en_Cartagena:_Manifesta_8.html)

c. Louise O'Hare, "Manifesta 8 and the Problems of Sincerity," *Afterall / Online*, November 24, 2010. Extended theoretical response to the biennial for *Afterall: Art, Context and Enquiry*, a journal based at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London. Best overall summary to date of the exhibition's problematics, with numerous illustrations. Online at: <http://www.afterall.org/online/manifesta8-and-the-problems-of-sincerity/> - .VIYDpHv0C3A

Manifesta 8's subtitle was: "Region of Murcia (Spain) in dialogue with North Africa."

But whereas Wilson-Goldie concludes that Manifesta 8 succeeded to a degree by largely ignoring this political brief, Steverlynck and O'Hare point to various aspects of cynicism and/or expediency in the way the exhibit's mandate was (not) executed and in their analysis view the exhibit as a failure.

This PDF contains copies of the articles in the above order. The articles can also be read online at the indicated URLs.

<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/manifesta-8-off-topic-but-riveting-exhibitions?pageCount=0>

# TheNational<sup>BETA</sup>

[Arts & Culture](#)

## **Manifesta 8: off-topic but riveting exhibitions**

[Kaelen Wilson-Goldie](#)

Last Updated: Oct 22, 2010



**Manifesta 8**  
Murcia and Cartagena, Spain

The Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA) began life as a small gallery, founded in 1973 and funded by the Friends of Puerto Rico, a non-profit initiative in New York. Initially known as the Cayman Gallery and located in a derelict industrial space in SoHo, it was part of a political movement that established alternative spaces for artists who fell outside of mainstream American culture, namely artists from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and from South and Central America, who had long settled in the United States but were still regarded as second-class citizens in the art scene.

In 1985, after organising more than 500 events (these included political action campaigns as well as shows, concerts and film screenings), Cayman declared itself a museum. It moved into a bigger space on lower Broadway and launched a programme of ambitious, expensive exhibitions that addressed the most controversial issues of the day: Aids, women's reproductive rights, discrimination against minorities, poverty and the widening gap between rich and poor. Both alone and in collaboration with other small, like-minded New York institutions such as the New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Studio Museum of Harlem, MoCHA positioned itself as one of the art world's champions against the conservatism of the Reagan administration.

Just five years later, MoCHA abruptly shut down, in the middle of an exhibition which included work by the then-unknown Gabriel Orozco. Later, the former director said that the museum's collapse was brought about by a sudden 200 per cent rent increase. Curators, however, blamed years of overreach and financial mismanagement as the real reasons.

This story of institutional implosion is the subject of a special six-part exhibition now on view in the southeastern Spanish city of Murcia. The MoCHA archives, including exhibition catalogues, press releases, correspondence, budgets, research materials, a panicked hand-written note from a staffer begging a donor for a quick infusion of cash, and, oddly, a letter from the White House desk of Ronald Reagan himself, commending MoCHA on its success, are now housed in the library of a community college in the Bronx.

They were made public, on written request, in 2004. Thanks to the Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (ACAF), the curator Yolanda Riquelme and six local artists who are bringing this fascinating material to life, those archives have now travelled to Spain. There they are serving as an apt repository of cautionary tales for the chaotic and unwieldy biennial extravaganza known as Manifesta.

Just as MoCHA caught a wave of identity politics and institutional critique in New York in the 1980s, Manifesta seized on the fall of the Berlin Wall as an opportunity to explore the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe in the 1990s. It paid particular attention to site specificity and sensitivity to local context. Fault lines and conflict zones have been Manifesta's *raison d'être* from the beginning, and its catalogues are peppered with catchphrases about borders, refugees, exile and diaspora.

To go by its own rhetoric, Manifesta is a radical reinvention of the biennial format. It mounts an international exhibition of contemporary art every two years, but unlike, say, Venice, it moves around. The first edition took place in Rotterdam, the second in Luxembourg, the third in Ljubljana. It is the only truly itinerant biennial in Europe, and it earned the official title of Visual Arts Ambassador of the European Commission two years ago. This may be less ironic than, for example, guerrilla theatre groups from the anti-Vietnam War era being named cultural emissaries for the US State Department and sent abroad to promote the same government they once hoped to topple (the San Francisco Mime Troupe, for example). Even so, to have become part of the EU's bureaucracy would seem to compromise Manifesta's claims to radicality.

Over time, Manifesta's concern for Europe's east-west axis has given way to interest in the continent's north-south divide, with subsequent editions taking up temporary residence in Italy and the Basque region of Spain. Now, in a move that seems explicitly attuned to headline news stories about immigration and assimilation, minarets and mosques, Manifesta is pushing toward Europe's southernmost border. The current edition, which opened two weeks ago and runs for three months, is taking place in the cities of Murcia and Cartagena. It is conceived, on paper at least, as an event held "in dialogue with North Africa".

Whatever that means, the curators chosen to assemble Manifesta 8 have thankfully ignored it. In its place they offer a loose and easygoing engagement with questions about the Mediterranean, the Levant, the Middle East, the Arab world, Spain's historical encounters with Islam, the African continent both on and below its northern rim, and cultural difference in general. Simply put, they offer the time and space to experience works of art that may be off-topic but which are riveting and challenging nonetheless. The Arab contingent is well represented, North African participation is patchy, and none of this really matters in the end.

Sherif el Azma's 20-minute video *Rice City* (2010) plays with the psychoanalytical interpretation of drives and desires, riffs on the conventions of film noir, and is by far the artist's best work to date. Lorraine O'Grady's installation of black and white photographs, *Miscegenated Family Album* (1994), is a revelation, based on one of her own performance pieces from 1980, and

retrieved from a period in art history that passed not so long ago but that still feels timeless and fresh. Ann Veronica Janssens' disorienting room full of dense pink artificial fog is biennial-style spectacle at its best and most irreverent.

Curated by three different groups, ACAF, the Chamber of Public Secrets (CPS) and tranzit.org, Manifesta 8 spreads across 14 venues in two cities some 50 kilometres apart and includes the work of close to 100 artists and collectives. In addition to exploring Europe's contested nooks and crannies, Manifesta has also established itself over the years as a laboratory for curatorial thought. Collectivity is this year's buzzword, which seems a little rich given that ACAF, CPS and tranzit.org worked almost entirely independently of one another. Their contributions are distinct and bounded, marked on the event's map in their own colour-coded blobs. Each group's portion of the show can be taken in as a single unit, rather than as part of an overall utopian design.

Tranzit.org is a solid show with more hits than misses, though too much preliminary rhetoric about how the process of putting it together generated a "Constitution for Temporary Display", presumably some kind of founding document for an imaginary republic of contemporary art. CPS rambles about politics and perception and privileges a certain aesthetic messiness. ACAF tests out its self-styled "Theory of Applied Enigmatics," and in the process, makes Manifesta 8 well worth the long and complicated haul.

ACAF's contribution is basically one project divided into four parts. An exhibition titled Overscore is installed in an old post office in Murcia and a new maritime museum in Cartagena. Prayers for Art is a collaborative piece, for which the astounding New York-based beatboxer Kenny Muhammad translates into sound the mood and tone of a series of short texts written by artists, critics and curators, expressing their hopes and fears about art itself.

Backbench is a streamlined architectural structure that played host to an assembly of speakers over the summer and now serves as a support for an immersive video installation delving into art, activism and institutional co-option. The MoCHA Sessions, reviving the history of the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, is a research project that has been given room to breathe in its own space, where six artists have been invited to produce six exhibitions using the failed museum's archives as material (the current show is organised by the artist Rosell Meseguer).

Instead of providing the dialogue requested by Manifesta's brief (ACAF being the only curatorial group actually from "North Africa), the curators Bassam el Baroni and Jeremy Beaudry initiated one further project, Incubator for a Pan-African Roaming Biennial, which, with a general coordinator and a raft of potential collaborators on board, will think through the process of creating an organisational

structure in Africa to match Manifesta in Europe. This seems a more satisfactory option than a one-off conversation that cannot, despite the organisers' best intentions, pass for anything besides an obvious token gesture.

ACAF's Theory of Applied Enigmatics is represented in the catalogue with a graphic that looks like two feedback loops which momentarily converge. It's an ingenious (and depressing) visual element that allows anyone remotely involved in the visual arts to chart their progress from, say, empowerment and the making of meaning, through reflection, analysis, losing focus, outrage, laying blame, scapegoating, denial, disbelief and loss of faith through to despair, cynicism and the dissolution of institutions. This is where ACAF's project overlaps with MoCHA and Manifesta itself. Four years ago, Manifesta nearly imploded under the weight of its own pretension when it tried to mount its sixth edition on either side of the divided island of Cyprus. The event was cancelled only weeks before the opening, amid a sea of acrimony, accusation and promises of legal action.

That was Manifesta's first brush with institutional collapse. It has since recovered but, on the evidence of Murcia, it remains an organisational and logistical mess. Just as identity politics and institutional critique did before, site-specificity and sensitivity to local context have fallen out of favour in the art world of late. To regain its radicality, Manifesta may have to give the token gestures a rest, get out of the cultural diplomacy game, and rediscover its critical footing. Otherwise it may suffer MoCHA's fate, or become yet another bloated, grandstanding biennial like the others.

*Kaelen Wilson-Goldie is a staff writer for The Review in Beirut.*

**Sam Steverlynck** | **Manifesta** is een zwervende kunstbiënnale die elke editie opereert vanuit een ander (grens)gebied. De biënnale positioneert zich als een tegengewicht voor locatiegebonden biënnales zoals bijvoorbeeld die van Venetië. De achtste editie – die zojuist werd geopend – vindt plaats in de Zuid- Spaanse steden Murcia en Cartagena. Ze werd samengesteld door drie curatorcollectieven: **ACAF** (Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum) **CPS** (Chamber of Public Secrets) en **tranzit.org**.

## **Manifesta 8**

9 okt. 2010 t/m 9 jan. 2011

[www.manifesta8.com](http://www.manifesta8.com)

### *Uitgemolken*

De ondertitel van de biënnale luidt: 'Region of Murcia (Spain) in dialogue with northern Africa'. Dat klinkt als een interessant uitgangspunt door de eeuwenlange vetes, contacten en invloeden tussen beide regio's. Alleen blijkt al gauw dat die ondertitel nogal problematisch is.

Er is weliswaar het Egyptische curatorencollectief ACAF, maar verder telt de biënnale niet bijster veel Noord-Afrikaanse kunstenaars. Van de uitgemolken term 'dialoog' is al helemaal geen sprake. Manifesta flirt met een politiek activisme dat zeer ongeloofwaardig overkomt. Het is niet meer dan holle retoriek en een vorm van cerebrale masturbatie, die intelligent noch diepgaand is.

Een van de dieptepunten is het buurtcentrum van Santa Lucia in Cartagena waar een hele zaal wordt ingenomen met researchmateriaal van **Archivo F.X.** Het 'research' van de kunstenaars leidt niet tot inspirerende bevindingen en nog minder tot knappe kunstwerken. Ook **The Arts Assembly** in Murcia kickt blijkbaar op stencils, prikborden en tabellen. Als men al een trend kan spotten op deze biënnale, moet het de terugkeer zijn van het fotokopieerapparaat dat hier blijkbaar overuren presteert.

### *Gevangenisellen*

Wel geslaagd zijn dan weer de originele locaties: van een in onbruik geraakte gevangenis, tot een casino en van een voormalig autopsiecentrum tot een postkantoor. In de **San Anton** gevangenis in Cartagena is **Thierry Geoffroy** (Colonel) één van de weinige kunstenaars die verwijst naar die zogenaamde 'dialoog met Noord-Afrika'. Hij sprokkelt op sensationele wijze opinies bij de lokale bevolking over hun Noord-Afrikaanse burens.

Ook bekritiseert hij op ironische wijze de afwezigheid van Noord-Afrikaanse kunstenaars door hen een cel voor te behouden waar ze alsnog hun werk kunnen tentoonstellen. Eén van de weinige geslaagde 'papers' is een reader over geweld van **Brumaria**, een collectief dat daarnaast in gevangenisellen een spervuur van beelden van gewelddadig politiegeweld op de bezoeker afvuurt.



### ***Bijproduct***

De curatorcollectieven vallen het klassieke model van “the authorship of the single curator” aan en zijn op zoek naar een andere manier van kennisproductie. Hun alternatief is echter helemaal niet overtuigend. Ondanks een overgewicht aan theoretisering en discursieve praktijken slagen ze er maar niet in een coherente visie of concept te ontwikkelen. Natuurlijk zijn er op deze biënnale ook knappe werken te ontdekken (**Laurent Grasso, Lorraine O’Grady, Metahaven, Erlea Maneros Zabala, ...**) maar die slagen er alsnog niet in om Manifesta 8 te redden. Kunst wordt hier blijkbaar toch eerder gezien als bijproduct.

Foto’s: **Sam Steverlynck**

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

[www.kunstbeeld.nl](http://www.kunstbeeld.nl)

### **Message from Murcia and Cartagena: Manifesta 8**

FESTIVALS  
Image Report

by Sam Steverlynck | Text translated from Dutch to English

**EXHIBIT INFO:** Manifesta is a roving art biennial each edition of which takes place in a different location. The biennial positions itself as a counterweight to such location-based biennials as the Venice Biennale. This eighth edition - which has just opened – is on view in the southern Spanish cities of Murcia and Cartagena. It is the combined work of three curatorial collectives: ACAF (Alexandria Contemporary ArtsForum), CPS (Chamber of Public Secrets), and tranzit.org.

Manifesta 8  
October 9 2010 until January 9 2011  
[www.manifesta8.com](http://www.manifesta8.com)

**review text:**

MILKED

The subtitle of the biennial is “Region of Murcia (Spain) in dialogue with North

Africa.” That sounds like an interesting starting point to work through the centuries of feuds, contacts and influences between the two regions. Only it soon becomes clear that the subtitle is in fact problematic. While it is true that there is an Egyptian curatorial collective, ACAF, otherwise the biennial counts few North African artists. The regurgitated word "dialogue" is there, and Manifesta appears to flirt with a political activism that is credible. But it is soon revealed to be the merest empty rhetoric and a form of cerebral masturbation, and not at all intelligent or profound. There are “research” and “archives” and stencils, boards, and tables. But if you can spot a trend in this biennial, it’s only the return of the photocopier that apparently performs overtime.

## PRISON CELLS

The exhibition locales vary from a disused prison, a casino, and an autopsy center to a former post office. In San Anton prison, Cartagena, Thierry Geoffroy is one of the few artists who refers to the so-called "dialogue with North Africa.” He gathers, in a sensationalist way, opinions of the locals about their North African neighbors. Also ironically, he criticizes the absence of North African artists by providing them a holding cell where they can exhibit their work. . . .

## BYPRODUCT

The guiding collectives say they are opposed to the classical model of author and individual receiver and that they are “looking for a different way of knowledge production.” But the alternative they offer is not at all convincing. Despite an excess of theoretical arguments and discursive practices, they have not succeeded in developing a concept or in producing a coherent vision. Indeed, there are a few beautiful works in this biennial. . . look for Laurent Grasso, Lorraine O’Grady, Metahaven, Erlea Maneros Zabala. . . but they do not succeed in saving Manifesta 8. Art is apparently still seen as a byproduct.

**Photos by Sam Steverlynck**

**Afterall • Online •**

<http://www.afterall.org/online/manifesta8-and-the-problems-of-sincerity/>

## Manifesta 8 and the Problems of Sincerity

Louise O'Hare

Published 24.11.2010

Photo:

*Bouchra Ouizgen, Madame Plaza in 15 min, 2010, performance. Courtesy Valerie Urrea.*

*Photograph: © My Saadi*

*The tone should be personal...*

*First person...*

*Not third person...*

*You need to be authentic...*

*...and honest*

In her video installation *Artist's Statement* (2010), shown in a dilapidated room in a former artillery barracks during this past Manifesta, Adela Jusic offered advice on how to construct an effective summary of one's intentions as an artist. The work was shown as part of 'Constitution for Temporary Display', an exhibition staged by tranzit.org, one of three curatorial collectives invited to curate the eighth edition of Manifesta, held in Murcia, Spain. Synced footage of Jusic, projected against opposing walls, showed her reading instructions on how to write a convincing artist's statement: her imperious, Eastern European-inflected voice firm and persistent, each iteration of herself concurring with the other and adding to the demands of this apparently innocuous piece of career advice. This work - an aspect of an

exhibition, a part of a biennial, a response by a collective to the aims of an umbrella organisation, which is itself within a network of supporting partners - is a good place to begin upon the questions raised by Manifesta 8, addressing as it does the authenticity or sincerity of the artistic persona and the limits of artistic freedom.

International Foundation Manifesta (IFM), the Amsterdam-based organisation that runs the 'roving European biennial', stated this year that Manifesta would aim 'to engage with the

north-south divide, specifically with Europe's present-day boundaries with northern Africa and its interrelations with the Maghreb region'. They further explained that the biennial's location in the Murcia region, in the southeast of Spain, was chosen due to 'the intertwining cultures in the region, its strategic location as a Mediterranean enclave and its particular character as an *authentic melting pot*'.<sup>1</sup> This desire for 'authenticity' is problematic when used in the context of

an attempted dialogue with north Africa; it suggests a search for the 'real' in an ethnographic sense, or the aim to acquire, marginalise or simplify 'other' cultural practices and experiences. It was therefore a relief to see the contribution of tranzit.org, which approached the idea of a dialogue with North Africa in a manner respecting the complexity of the relations this implied. Elaborating upon correspondences between postcolonial and post-communist histories and embracing the opportunity to bring together an interesting, if well-travelled, selection of artists for this aim,<sup>2</sup> tranzit.org asked these artists to discuss a set of forty questions collectively,<sup>3</sup> an approach that resulted in works that seemed to multifariously tackle the question of what a 'dialogue' with North Africa might mean.

Video still:

*Neil Beloufa, Kempinski, 2009, video, 14 min. Courtesy the artist*

Tranzit.org's section, 'Constitution for Temporary Display', included *Madame Plaza* (2009), an intimate choreography designed by Bouchra Ouizguen and three Aïta dancers, Kabboura AïtBen Hmad, Fatima El Hanna and Naïma Sahmoud,<sup>4</sup> and the video installation *Kempinski* (2007) by Neil Beloufa, which comprised a screen made of MDF, painted shapes and an elaborate seating contraption. Filmed at night in Mopti, Mali, the video cuts between a flashing street lamp, a floodlit field and composed tableaux showing individuals talking to the camera. In one scene a young man holding a fluorescent lamp, standing alone on a patch of dirt, explains:

*I am the only man who lives with hundreds of oxen [...] There is a very good agreement between us. My wife the cow has given birth to two cows and the baptism is for tomorrow. The orchestra will come [...] the party will be beautiful.*

Meanwhile the herd trundle into the picture, suddenly looking a little menacing, lowing in agreement. Another man states, from behind the green glow of a large leaf,

*We do not need cars or planes [...] We move through light, through sound. From here I can get to the North Pole in half a second.*

Beloufa's sleight of hand in producing this documentary-cum-sci-fi film was simply to ask people to describe the future as if it were the present. The narratives offered – all quite convincing - did not seem to be performances or lies, but rather the footage was edited to create a sense of misplaced storytelling. Functioning as both conjured future world, performance and ethnographic documentary, the video plays with the assumptions its audience might make about the 'backwards' nature of isolated rural Africa, and what 'we' might take to be 'authentic'.

In series of lectures delivered at the end of the 1960s, Lionel Trilling addressed the difference between authenticity and sincerity, describing how 'at a certain point in its history the moral life of Europe added to itself a new element, the state or quality of the self which we call 'sincerity'.<sup>5</sup> Trilling implied that sincerity is socially defined - it is related to what we aim to be and how we would like others to see us - while the notion of authenticity had come to be considered something more essential, related to primal urges. Describing this 'modern concern with authenticity', and citing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) as its 'troubling', 'paradigmatic literary expression',<sup>6</sup> he showed how a 'Stygian authenticity' was depicted as something latent within the character Kurtz and uncovered when the 'constructs of civilization' were removed and he 'regressed to savagery'.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, sincerity, with its origins in the social, emerges as a concept altogether more slippery.

In *Madame Plaza*, Ouizguen holds her arms outstretched above her head and beats her hands back and forth; her body gently shakes - she is steadily unsteady, stepping carefully across a patterned mattress. Three women sit on another mattress, proprietarily, legs wide, staring into the distance and waiting. Ouizguen continues slowly towards

them, leaning forwards, moving her arms up and down as if paddling gently in the air. Looking ready to laugh or cry, the others watch as she glides past, her expansive movements pulling along a graceful heaviness. Over the course of this deliberate performance the pace accelerates and the other women join in: swaying, chanting, and embracing one another, their voices guttural and almost pained. Taking part in something between a hug and a play fight, they become a boisterous pile of bodies. Lying down beside one another, arms outstretched, they roll, not to an obvious rhythm but carefully, studiously, as if following the well-remembered instructions of a favourite recipe - kneading themselves together.

Aïtas are traditional Moroccan wedding dancers and Ouizguen, a Moroccan who trained in choreography in France, worked with this small group of dancers over a number of years to develop the performance. *Madame Plaza* could have embodied the worst kind of search for the 'authentic' - appropriating a traditional dance form as well as the dancers themselves, and fusing this with European contemporary choreography to 'update' it for the delectation of a Western audience. However there was in this piece a careful respect for the tradition it studied, not as ancient form, but as a current and multi-faceted mode of expression. The dancers' lewd gestures and the moments where it seemed they were trying to make each other laugh displayed comradeship and intimacy of the women, and the performance functioned as an independent statement - both specific and impossible to locate.

'You need to be *authentic*' - Jusic's repeated instructions were pointedly ironic. The installations in the darkened rooms of the dusty old barracks, post office and prison where the biennial was held, read overwhelmingly as biennial aesthetic, for instance with the co-opting of a historic venue to add local significance to an international, portable feast. Traipsing between venues across the city of Murcia, and an hour south to the port town of Cartagena, merely drew attention to the lack of local artists involved in the biennial. Only six artists from the region were listed in the 'pocket guide'; these were invited by another of the curatorial teams, Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum (ACAF), to respond to the archive of the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art in New York.<sup>8</sup> The ACAF also instigated 'Incubator for a Roaming Pan African Biennial', a platform from which to consider the potential of producing an African biennial similar to Manifesta. The 'Incubator' launched with a symposium on the opening Sunday of Manifesta, and began by unravelling its own proposition - reflecting on the pitfalls, contradictions and motivations of biennials in a thoughtful and

practical manner. This project will continue over the next year, having begun with meetings at The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo earlier this month, continuing in a workshop in April 2011 in an African city yet to be decided, and concluding with a publication in September 2011.<sup>9</sup> It is, however, revealing to note that although Manifesta described itself as concerned specifically with 'interrelations with the Maghreb region' the ACAF collective from Egypt was the only African curatorial team,<sup>10</sup> and Manifesta neglected to involve any of the many cultural initiatives active in nearby Morocco.<sup>11</sup> This omission may have accounted for the small proportion of North African artists invited by its appointed curators: of over one hundred artists listed in the guide just ten were noted as being born, or now living in Africa, and of these just one was from the Maghreb region.<sup>12</sup> It is such vagaries regarding both form and resulting content which gave the sense that the enterprise was not only failing at its aims, but wasn't even trying.

The third collective, Chamber of Public Secrets (CPS), an organisation located across Europe and in Lebanon, specifically described themselves as producing 'transmissions',<sup>13</sup> so it may not have been surprising to find their version of dialogue somewhat monologic. They were responsible for one-dimensional institutional critique in the form of Thierry Geoffroy's 'biennialist' character *Colonel* (2010),<sup>14</sup> and the most straightforward responses to the Murcian context: for example, screening Laurent Grasso's film of the ancient fortifications of Cartagena, *The Bateria Project* (2010), in an eighteenth-century autopsy theatre that overlooks the city, and Abed Anouti's documentary about San Antón Prison in the prison itself, which was one of the exhibition areas. Other commissions included Fay Nicholson's newspaper project (*La Verdad*, 2010), and a number of projects engaging with detainees,<sup>15</sup> including Marcelo Expósito and Verónica Iglesia's photography workshop and resulting publication (*Country Europa*, 2010), Nada Prjla's video project with inmates of a Murcian detention facility (*Foreign Language for Beginners*, 2010) and David Rych's 'experiment' with introducing juveniles from youth custody to adults serving long-term prison sentences (*Encounter*, 2010). Rych's video footage of these meetings was projected above monitors screening videos made by the inmates showing their living conditions and explaining their day to day life - snapshots which were fascinating as much for normality of the life they described as for the more

sordid details of life incarcerated. Oddly enough, prisoners in Murcian rehabilitation programmes had volunteered in installing the biennial - a fact that could have been interesting in the context of such reflections on the limits of freedom, but which was never publicised by the Manifesta team.<sup>16</sup>

In his 1969 lectures Trilling noted that the concept of sincerity had 'lost most of its former high dignity' and seemed 'quaint': 'If we speak it, we are likely to do so with either discomfort or irony'.<sup>17</sup> It might therefore seem anachronistic to suggest that the fault of Manifesta 8 was its insincerity. However a form of sincerity is surely required when undertaking ventures that aim to go beyond re-exhibiting some interesting works to an international audience. Describing the etymology of 'sincerity' from the Latin 'clean, or sound, or pure' to its early sixteenth-century use, which was 'largely metaphorical - a man's life is sincere in the sense of being sound, or pure or whole; or consistent in its virtuousness', Trilling noted that by the time Shakespeare was using the word it had come to mean 'the absence of dissimulation, feigning or pretence', 'with no apparent awareness of it ever having been used metaphorically',<sup>18</sup> stating that

*Society requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are. In short we play the role of being ourselves, we sincerely act the part of the sincere person, with the result that a judgement may be passed upon our sincerity that it is not authentic.*<sup>19</sup>

By so allowing for an inauthenticity of sincerity, Trilling underlines the performative nature of sincerity as well as the problems inherent in any attempt at 'being authentic', which both audience and artists laboured to come to terms with during this Manifesta and its various contradictions.

Indeed throughout its fourteen years, Manifesta has always sought 'complex situations and diverse geo-political areas' in which to engage, and this has led to productive conflicts and open-ended results, such as the cancelled Manifesta 6 that hoped to establish an art school in both the Turkish and Greek areas of Nicosia. With certain exceptions, this year's Manifesta lacked both the acuity and conviction that such interesting malfunctions require. Manifesta 9 - fail better.



## Footnotes

1. 'Region of Murcia in dialogue with Northern Africa', statement on Manifesta 8 website. Available at [http://www.manifesta8.com/manifesta/manifesta8.manifesta\\_8\\_region\\_of\\_murcia](http://www.manifesta8.com/manifesta/manifesta8.manifesta_8_region_of_murcia). Emphasis the author's.↑
2. For example, Stephan Dillemath, Karl Holmqvist, The Otolith Group, Tris Vonna-Michell, etc.↑
3. The questions were focused on the conventions of the biennial format and were addressed by both the artists and the tranzit.org team in a collective procedure. See Tranzit.org's statement on 'Constitution for Temporary Display', pocket guide, *Manifesta 8*, Murcia: IMF and Region de Murcia, 2010, p.14.↑
4. A new version of the dance was staged as part of the opening celebrations, and footage of *Madame Plaza* (2009) was also screened on a monitor as part of an installation at the barracks. A monitor on the floor showed the performance on loop and three foam mattresses annotated with symbols: hearts, plants and line drawings of female nudes, leaned against a wall.↑
5. Lionel Trilling, 'Sincerity: Its Origin and Rise', *Sincerity and Authenticity, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1969-70*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1971, p.2↑
6. *Ibid.*, p.106↑
7. *Ibid.*, p.108↑
8. The team comprised Gonzalo Ballester, Alfonso Escudero, Jeleton, Irene Lucas & Christoph Euler, Ana Martínez and Rosell Meseguer.↑
9. 'Bringing you the answers before we know the question: four positions regarding the idea of a pan-African roaming biennial', Symposium on Sunday 10th of October, 2010, Espacio 0, Centro Parraga, Murcia. More information available at <http://www.panafricannial.org/>↑
10. Although Egypt is a 'North African' country, geographically it is as close to Spain as Poland is, and is not part of the Maghreb region, which refers collectively to Morocco, Algeria,

Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania and the disputed territory of Western Sahara.↑

11. Examples might have been the Cinémathèque of Tangier, L'appartement 22 in Rabat or indeed Anania, the first contemporary dance company in Marrakech founded by Bouchra Ouizguen.↑

12. Bouchra Ouizguen. This statistic is taken from information provided by Manifesta 8 in the form of a 'pocket guide', where artists place of birth and current working location is listed.

Of course the presence of cultural interchanges with Africa are more complex than a simple head count of nationalities can describe - Neil Beloufa, though listed as born and living in France, might be described by many as French/Algerian (his parents are Algerian), a relevance overlooked by such methods. Nonetheless these statistics indicate the lack of need to physically locate a dialogue with Africa in Murcia, over any other European country.↑

13. CPS are Khaled Ramadan and Alfredo Cramerotti. They conceived Manifesta 8 as 'a series of 'transmissions' (including works of art and many diverse interventions in the mass media, on local, national and international levels), using different artistic methods and strategies of negotiation'. Pocket guide, *Manifesta 8, op. cit.*, p.31↑

14. Playing a 'colonial' in a bowtie and safari hat, Thierry Geoffrey contributed boorish live TV interviews asking local people what a dialogue with North Africa meant, and designated his space in St Anton Prison as open to artists from North Africa.↑

15. The tangible results of these commissions presented at MUBAM, Museo de Bellas Artes, Murcia.↑

16. The management and conditions of work for the volunteers was not organised by Manifesta directly but by the 'programa de reinsercion social', a government integration and rehabilitation programme working with regional organisations to organize such placements. The same organisations worked with the curatorial group CPS to produce the above commissions and the further collaboration developed from this contact.↑

17. 'When we hear it, we are conscious of the anachronism which touches it with quaintness [...] In its commonest employment it has sunk to the level of mere intensive, in which capacity it has an effect that negates its literal intention- 'I sincerely believe' has less weight than 'I believe'. [...] To praise a work of literature by calling it sincere is now at best a way of saying that although it need be given no aesthetic or intellectual admiration, it was at least conceived in innocence of heart.' L. Trilling, 'Sincerity: Its Origin and Rise', *op. cit.*, p.6↑

18. *Ibid.*, p.12-13↑

19. *Ibid.*, p.10-11↑