

The Architectural Bienal/Biennale: A Framework for Cross-Cultural Disciplinary Dialogue

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INTRODUCTION

The role of architecture in public exhibitions has been substantial over the last two centuries. Several broad types of exhibitions categorize the evolving public awareness, even inculcation, of design's role in society. From the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, a series of great national industrial and trade exhibitions – London in 1851, Paris in 1889, Chicago in 1892, and New York in 1939 – each utilized new architecture as a presentation vehicle and more: The architecture of these world fairs became emblematic of the cultural shifts embodied by the new technologies on display within the exhibition buildings.

A more focused approach to mining the new expressive and iterative potential of architecture was evident in a series of full-scale demonstration projects built in the early twentieth century. With examples like the Darmstadt arts colony and the Weissenhof Siedlung, the introduction of modern architecture and modern aesthetics to a wide segment of the public was made manifest through the large-scale exhibition of buildings.

The emergence of the Architecture Biennale in recent decades continues the evolution of the public presentation of new architectural ideas. Building on a longer tradition of arts exhibitions, these architectural descendants emphasize the

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cultivation of a public audience for the design disciplines, while adding two new components: First, the re-emergence of the art of architecture late in the twentieth century has been reinforced by these exhibitions, most notably in the geographic link occasioned by siting major art and architecture biennales in Venice. The second major theme has been the internationalization of the biennale, both in location and in content. Major new exhibitions have been held on a majority of continents in the last decade, and a consistent theme has been the broad examination of different trends in disparate locations. At this moment, at least, globalization has made it possible for both the public and the profession to be aware of numerous intellectual discourses simultaneously at work around the globe.