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Artist-curators reveal their exhibition proposals for the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo

Seven group shows curated by selected artists will be exhibited alongside twelve individual projects selected by chief curator Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (previously announced), composing a model that gives voice to the artists and values their interpretations over their own production contexts

Appointed by the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo as curator of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo – *Affective Affinities* after his proposal of organizing the event through an alternative ‘operating system’, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro has conceived a Bienal that values the artists’ gaze on their own creative contexts and avoids a large thematic exhibition in favor of multiple curatorial experiences. As well the twelve individual projects previously announced, this edition includes group shows organized by seven artist-curators: Alejandro Cesarco (Uruguay/USA, 1975), Antonio Ballester Moreno (Spain, 1977), Claudia Fontes (Argentina/UK, 1964), Mamma Andersson (Sweden, 1962), Sofia Borges (Brazil, 1984), Waltercio Caldas (Brazil, 1946) and Wura-Natasha Ogunji (USA/Nigeria, 1970).

In the same way that the individual projects do not configure a group show in the traditional sense and are not linked by any thematic or narrative structure, the artist-curators’ proposals are completely independent from each other. ‘The seven artist-curators have been working with full autonomy both in regards to each other and to the general curatorship. The only imposed limitations are of a practical nature such as budgets and the use of physical space within the Bienal Pavilion’, explains Pérez-Barreiro.

Guided exclusively by the concept of ‘affective affinities’ and by the premise that their own artworks must also integrate their curatorial project, each of the artist-curators has responded to Pérez-Barreiro’s invitation in their own individual way, adopting different methodologies and curatorial strategies. ‘While some have adopted strategies that are more museum-like and historical, selecting existing artworks, others have proposed shows that present exclusively commissioned pieces, establishing a sort of collective curatorship in a horizontal process of artistic research. The proposals are seven different examples of curatorial methodology’, he adds.

The projects

For her exhibition *Stargazer II*, **Mamma Andersson** selected a group of artists that have inspired and fueled her own production as a painter. The selection includes a wide range of references, such as 15th century Russian icons, the outsiders Henry Darger (USA, 1892-1973) and Dick

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Bengtsson (Sweden, 1936-1989), and contemporary artists, such as filmmaker Gunvor Nelson (Sweden, 1931) and fighter pilot and sound artist Åke Hodell (Sweden, 1919-2000), among others. The participants share a common interest in expressive figuration and the human body. 'I am interested in artists who work with melancholia and introspection as a way of life and as a survival strategy', explains Andersson. The exhibition also includes a large number of Andersson's paintings, presenting a vibrant dialogue between her production and her artistic inspiration.

Antonio Ballester Moreno approaches his curatorial project for the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo as a way of contextualising a world based on the intimate relationship that exist between biology and culture, with references to the history of abstraction and its interplay with nature, pedagogy and spirituality. For this purpose, he brings together the work of philosophers, scientists and artists: 'because we are all creators of our own world, but I understand that such a variety of languages has separated us from a sense of the common, so this proposal focuses on the study of our origins, whether in relation to natural, social or subjective aspects — the three axis that organise the exhibition', states Ballester Moreno.

Titled *sentido/comum* [common/sense], his project encompasses educational toys from the historical avant-gardes, artworks from the Escuela de Vallecas (a Spanish avant-garde movement of the 1930s close to surrealism) and works by contemporary artists. Amongst the participants (including the artist-curator himself), the exhibition features the philosopher and educator Friedrich Fröbel (Germany, 1782-1852); Andrea Büttner (Germany, 1972); Mark Dion (USA, 1961), who presents a commissioned project; and Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniagua (Spain, 1979), who is a member of the Atenta collective whose research focuses on practices of attention in the field of art. Other than participating in Ballester Moreno's show, Paniagua has also contributed to the educational publication of the 33rd Bienal, *Convite à atenção* [Invitation to Attention], with a new text written for the occasion.

Sofia Borges' curatorial project, titled *A Infinita História das Coisas ou o Fim da Tragédia do um* [The Infinite History of Things or the End of the Tragedy of One], explores a collage of mythological references based on philosophical interpretations of Greek tragedy. Her proposal is the formulation of an active space to investigate the limits of representation and language's inability to mediate the real. 'In my work, I have spent years attempting to use images to reveal the state of the representation of things, until I understood there is no solution to this because, in fact, it is a question of meaning. Language is tragic per se, as it is ambiguous. One material cannot be used to talk about another', the artist explains.

Under this conceptual premise, the exhibition project draws on a mixed curatorial model in which the selection of specific artworks is accompanied by commissioned works by invited artists. One of the singularities of Borges' proposal — which includes works by Jennifer Tee (HOL, 1973), Leda Catunda (BRA, 1961), Sarah Lucas (UK, 1962) and Tal Isaac Hadad (FRA, 1976), amongst others — is to confront the exhibition as something conjured beyond space but also in time. As such, the

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show will be activated over three months via a programme of experimentation proposed by the artist-curator exploring the interaction between the artworks, artists and guests.

Waltercio Caldas — whose production has always drawn on the history of art — proposes an exhibition room where artworks from different artists are confronted with his own works. ‘Given that an artist’s practice deals with numerous issues that vary throughout time, I have chosen artworks that deviate from their most well-known aspects and that stand out for their quality and specificity. The outcomes from the relationships between the selected pieces became my main interest’, explains the artist.

Caldas’ proposal puts forward a reflection on poetics, as well as the nature of forms and ideas and its implication on the production of art since the late 19th century. ‘In looking at the tension between these very diverse artworks, I have searched for the illuminating surprises that surface from their friction’. Challenging his own work and highlighting often-unexpected interactions — such as between the work of Victor Hugo (FRA, 1802-1885), Jorge Oteiza (SPA, 1908-2003) and Vicente do Rego Monteiro (BRA, 1899-1970) — we see the emergence of new possibilities of reading art.

Alejandro Cesarco’s proposal is based on his interest in issues such as repetition, narrative, and translation. He has selected artworks from artists that share some of his conceptual and aesthetic concerns. Titled *Aos nossos pais* [To Our Parents], the show ‘questions how the past (our history) both enables and frustrates possibilities, how we rewrite the past with our work, and how difference is produced in repetition’, Cesarco explains. As well as the artist-curator himself, the exhibition presents artists from three different generations, including Sturtevant (USA, 1924 – France, 2014), Louise Lawler (USA, 1947) and Cameron Rowland (USA, 1988). ‘To dedicate the show to a primary relation (biological or adopted, literal or metaphorical) is a way of constructing a genealogy and trying to get close to the core source of our understandings, methods, inhibitions, possibilities, and expectations.’

For her exhibition titled *O pássaro lento* [The Slow Bird], **Claudia Fontes** draws on a metanarrative: a fictional book of the same title whose contents are unknown, except for some fragments and a few material remains. Both Fontes and her invited artists present artworks that activate links between the visual arts, literature and translation, through experiences that propose expanded temporality as an alternative to the modern fetish of speed. ‘The experience of speed and slowness are political experiences rooted in the body. They both influence understandings of space, distance, and chance. For over a century now, our species was trained from a young age to despise slowness and to desire speed. As a result, we are now all struggling when trying to imagine a different way of being with oneself and with each other.’, affirms Fontes.

In a horizontal and collaborative curatorial process, every participant, with the exception of Roderick Hietbrink (Holland, 1975), produced commissioned works for the occasion: Ben Rivers

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(UK, 1972), Daniel Bozhkov (Bulgaria, 1959), Elba Bairon (Bolivia, 1947), Katrín Sigurdardóttir (Iceland/USA, 1967), Pablo Martín Ruiz (Argentina, 1964), Paola Sferco (Argentina, 1974), Sebastián Castagna (Argentina, 1965) and Žilvinas Landzbergas (Lithuania, 1979).

For her exhibition project titled *sempre, nunca* [always, never], composed exclusively of commissioned artworks, **Wura-Natasha Ogunji** invited the artists Lhola Amira (South Africa, 1984), Mame-Diarra Niang (France, 1982), Nicole Vlado (USA, 1980), ruby onyinyechi amanze (Nigeria, 1982) and Youmna Chlala (Lebanon, 1974) to create, like herself, artworks through a collaborative and horizontal curatorial project. The work of these six artists 'range from the intimate (body, memory, gesture) to the epic (architecture, history, nation)', explains Ogunji. 'In an open and ongoing dialogue, our individual projects encompass different practices and languages, intersecting at ideas and questions crucial to experimentation, freedom and the creative process'.

Each artist's practice is impacted by their individual histories and by the complex relationship they have with their land, nations and territories. 'But it is not the fact of origins or homelands that is revelatory, rather that their work subverts hegemonic narratives and embraces the interruptions as necessary openings', adds the artist-curator.

Exhibition design

The autonomy principle of the project is extended to the exhibition design, which varies in each exhibition. However, they share a common concern: to create an experience that shapes visitors' expectations when they step into the Bienal Pavilion. The exhibition design, conceived by architect Alvaro Razuk, includes the creation of open areas for taking a rest or reflecting on the different exhibition proposals. This was in line with Pérez-Barreiro's overall vision of creating spaces that favour slowing-down, observing and sharing experiences.

Publications

The editorial project of the 33rd Bienal de São Paulo works as a platform that expands the artists' contributions by allowing them to explore the artist book format as a complement to the exhibition. The catalogue brings together a collection of 19 publications, including brochures and posters, developed in collaboration with the Fundação Bienal team, under the editorial consultancy of Fabiana Werneck.

Due to be launched in the first weeks of September, an additional publication will showcase photographic records of the exhibition, a visual essay by photographer Mauro Restiffe, as well as texts and interviews. In this volume, the artist-curators will comment on the development of their choices for the show and how their own works respond to the proposal.

Artist residencies

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Through a partnership with FAAP's Artist Residency Programme – ongoing since the 27th Bienal de São Paulo (2016) and reviewed at each edition of the show – five artists will be in residency in São Paulo to develop their projects for this edition of the Bienal: Lhola Amira (South Africa, 1984), Luiza Crosman (Brazil, 1987), Mame-Diarra Niang (France, 1982), Tal Isaac Hadad (France, 1976) and Tamar Guimarães (Brazil, 1967).

Professional and press accreditation

The process for obtaining professional and press credentials is still open on the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo website. A press preview will take place on 4 September 2018. On 5-6 September the show will be opened to guests and art professionals. And on 21-23 September Fundação Bienal will be hosting, for the first time, the 'International Weekend' for international professionals.

The foundation behind the 33rd Bienal

The proposal presented by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro and selected by the Fundação Bienal for its 33rd edition resonates with the institution's own vocation, as well as with its commitment to remaining a contemporary agent in the 21st century. By questioning mainstream models and rethinking large-scale art exhibitions, the project is in line with the Fundação Bienal's everyday operation, which consists of always looking for the new without losing sight of more than six decades of history.

33rd Bienal de São Paulo – *Affective affinities*

from 7 September to 9 December 2018
Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion, Ibirapuera Park
www.bienal.org.br

Press preview: 4 September 2018

Preview for the press, art professionals and guests: 5-6 September 2018

International Weekend: 21-23 September 2018

Press accreditation: bienal.org.br/press33

Professional accreditation: bienal.org.br/accreditation

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