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Contents

Introduction	5
1. The Ethnographic Field Research	11
1.1. Research Interest and Field Approach.....	11
1.2. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis	12
1.2.1. Participant Observations and Infrastructure Field notes.....	13
1.2.3. Semi-structured Interviews and Informal Talks	14
1.2.4. Sound and Visual Documentation	15
1.2.5. Reflection on Research Process and Position in the Field.....	15
1.2.6. Qualitative Content Analysis.....	16
1.3. Introducing the Research Data	17
1.3.1. Interlocutors.....	17
1.3.2. Observations.....	20
2. Contextualisation of Art and Exhibition-Making.....	24
2.1. Anthropological Perspectives on Art.....	25
2.2. Anthropological Perspectives on Exhibition-Making	28
3. Contemporary Art Worlds.....	30
3.1. Contemporary Art and Globalisation	31
3.2. World Art and Global Art.....	33
4. Biennials – A Global Exhibition Form.....	36
4.1. Genesis of Contemporary Art Biennials.....	38
4.2. Potentials and Challenges of the Biennial Format.....	40
4.3. The Discursive Exhibition: From Spectacle to Local Specifics	44
4.3.1. Platforms for Intra-regional and Global Dialogue.....	46
5. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale	49
5.1. India’s Contemporary Scene	50
5.2. Exploring India’s Biennale Story	52
5.3. A “People’s Biennale”	55

6. “Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life” – A Case Study	60
6.1. Curator’s Story	62
6.1.1. Anita Dube	63
6.1.2. The Curatorial Frame	64
6.2. The Exhibition Infrastructure	66
6.2.1. Venues	67
6.2.2. “Creative Economy”	75
6.2.3. “It’s Our Biennale”	79
6.3. Art Projects: Local Particularities and Critical Perspectives.....	81
6.3.1. The Loom	85
6.3.2. Site-specific Engagement	90
6.4. The Pavilion: A Platform for Discussions.....	95
6.4.1. Let’s Talk	99
7. Discussion	104
8. Conclusion.....	109
References	114
Literature	114
Internet Sources	121
Figures	123
List of Interviews.....	125
List of Field Notes.....	125
Appendix	127
Abstract (English).....	127
Abstract (German).....	128

Illustrations

Figure 1. Entrance to Aspinwall House, A Place Beyond Belief at KMB 2018	5
Figure 2. Artist's Profiles at KMB 2018, numbers have been derived from KMB Short Guide 2018 .	20
Figure 3. KMB Short Guide with notes on exhibition observation and interlocutor Chandan Gomes .	21
Figure 4. Map of Kochi Muziris Biennale venues 2018.....	22
Figure 5. Location of KMB, Fort Kochi, Mattancherry and Ernakulam - city of Kochi and district of Ernakulam	56
Figure 6. Kochi Biennale Foundation, Posters "It's my/our biennale"	58
Figure 7. Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life 2018, Curatorial Note at Aspinwall House	63
Figure 8. Anand Warehouse, Cabral Yard, MAP Project, Aspinwall House (from the top left to the bottom right).....	68
Figure 9. Café at Pepper House.....	71
Figure 10. The Pavilion for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018-19.....	78
Figure 11. Infra-Project Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam at KMB 2018.....	82
Figure 12. CON-struction I and artist Arunkumar HG (on the left) at KMB 2018.....	83
Figure 13. Missing Route by Bapi Das at KMB 2018	85
Figure 14. Missing Route by Bapi Das	85
Figure 15. Tania Candiani's sound installation String Loom at KMB 2018.....	88
Figure 16. Santha KV's outdoor installation in a mango tree at Aspinwall, KMB 2018	89
Figure 17. Marzia Farhana's Multimedia Installation Ecocide and the Rise of Free Fall at KMB 2018	91
Figure 18. Urban Requiem: New World Climax by Barthelemy Toguo at KMB 2018.....	92
Figure 19. Vipin Dhanurdharan at the community kitchen, KMB 2018.....	94
Figure 20. Circular dining space of Vipin's Sahodharar at KMB 2018.....	95
Figure 21. Edible Archives at Cabral Yard, KMB 2018	96
Figure 22. ABC Art Room, Gond Art Workshop at KMB 2018.....	98
Figure 23. Don't Stereotype Me! by Guerrilla Girls at Aspinwall.....	100
Figure 24. Let's Talk Guerrilla Girls at the Pavilion	101

Introduction

At noon on 12th of December 2018, I jumped off the tuk-tuk next to Aspinwall, a former warehouse and hub of the spice trade. Arriving at the colonial heritage property, I was welcomed by the illuminated text “A Place Beyond Belief”. It was the opening day of the 4th edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), taking place for three months every second year since 2012 in Kochi, a major port city in the state of Kerala in Southwest India. It was also the beginning of my two-month field research for my master thesis project (field note, Dec 12, 2018).



Figure 1. Entrance to Aspinwall House, *A Place Beyond Belief* at KMB 2018

Between 12 December 2018 and 29 March 2019, the artist-curator Anita Dube hosted the fourth edition called *Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life*. The curator envisioned the Biennale as an inclusive and discursive space, where exhibiting artists and visitors share ideas and voices from marginalized groups can be heard (Dube 2018: 24).

With over 600,000 visitors arriving for the 2016 edition, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is the largest biennial in South-East Asia and an outstanding example of the proliferation of biennials (KPMG 2017: 34). Robert E. D'Souza, editor of "India's Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art" (2016), points out that the reforms through economic liberation of post-independence India in the 1990s led to an increased international interest in Indian arts and a more contemporary and internationally focused Indian art practice. According to D` Souza, those developments culminated in the entry of India in the 54th Venice Biennale 2011 and were followed by the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, founded by renown Keralan-born artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, practicing in Mumbai (D'Souza 2013: 298f). The aim of the Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) – conceived in 2010 – is to evoke a dialogue between artists, curators, and the public. New Indian and international perceptions of art should be discussed, and alternatives to the political and cultural concepts of the West should be postulated (URL 1).

According to various art scholars and professionals, biennials create the dominant discourses around contemporary art today. Anthropologists Thomas Fillitz and Paul van der Grijp write in their reader "An Anthropology of Contemporary Art" about the extensive proliferation of contemporary art biennials throughout the world. Especially the global South, with more than 250 exhibitions, shows that biennials are replacing museums of modern art as spaces for displaying the latest developments and creations of contemporary art. Since the 1990s, there has been an increased awareness that contemporary art is not exclusive to the Western hemisphere but is created in all parts of the world (Fillitz/van der Grijp 2018: 1). According to the contemporary art historians Charles Green and Anthony Gardener, biennials are one of the most striking phenomena in the contemporary global culture. They have come to define contemporary art since the early 1990s (Green/Gardener 2016: 3).

While the Venice Biennale is grounded on the concept of national pavilions with national representation and the aim to show the best and most renowned artists, newly emerging biennials instead focus on discursivity and regional specificities. According to curator and art theorist Simon Sheikh, new biennial formats are "bringing the world of art to a particular place, in effect translating the international to the local(s)." (Sheikh 2009: 68f). Recently there has been a turn towards the so-called discursive biennial. Cultural theorist and curator of the first national Indian Pavilion at Venice Biennale – Ranjit Hoskote notes, current biennials tend to create spaces of "a discursive environment". He describes it as "a theatre that allows for the staging of arguments, speculations, and investigations concerning the nature of our shared,

diversely veined, and demanding contemporary condition” (Hoskote 2010: 308). The format of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, a relatively new biennial, serves as research field to investigate how the international exhibition format is translated into a specific local context within the so-called “discursive environment”.

In the framework of this master thesis’s, “Hope for Dialogue: Discursive and Intra-Regional Exhibition-Making at Kochi Muziris Biennale 2018/19”, I have examined the global phenomenon of the biennial based on a case study of the fourth Kochi-Muziris Biennale. My field research aimed to answer the following research questions:

How is this globally proliferated format practiced in a regional context?

How are site-specificity, social relations, and local particularities constitutive for the KMB 2018?

How does the discursive biennial format facilitate critical discourse through contemporary art and exhibition-making?

The conceptual framework of my thesis constitutes the anthropology of art, especially theoretical debates on global art, contemporary art biennials and exhibition-making. Biennials as field of study are interdisciplinary in their approach. Therefore, this paper is not limited to anthropological theories, rather it focusses on various discourses about the biennial phenomenon.

Besides some critical analysis and anthologies on multiple biennials (Bydler 2004; Altshuler 2013; Weiss 2011; Clark 1998; Green and Gardener 2016; Fillitz 2016; Filipovic et al. 2010), there has been a lack of scholarly and theoretical examinations of the biennial phenomena. Other aspects of global processes and cultural production have long been part of in-depth research in the social sciences. As has been noted by Green and Gardener, the new mapping of art is an effect of global processes, and the proliferation of the biennials is a crucial aspect in this context (Green/Gardener 2016: 4). There are new challenges for research. Art in its historical and geographical dimension, and specifically contemporary art, can no longer be debated from the position of occidental art history. New conceptions are developed, and new institutional frameworks, such as the biennials, demand in-depth investigations (Fillitz/ van der Grijp 2018: 2). Anthropologist Fillitz and van der Grijp point out that an “emphasis on the site-specificity and social relations as constitutive of the artistic process, away from the artwork as a distinct object,” has attracted anthropologists to collaborate with artists (ibid.). The claim of

considering social relations and local particularities require a category of contemporary art from the perspective of local knowledge production and art practices (ibid.).

An anthropological approach and the ethnographic field research in a specific local context extend the category of art by placing art in its social and cultural context. According to anthropologist Alfred Gell, art is a social force, working upon and within the cultural context of its production, engagement, and process of meaning-making. Rather than examining artworks through an evaluative aesthetic scheme, Gell's approach focusses on agency, social relationships, and the performative aspects of artworks (Gell 1998: 3 ff). In this sense, the anthropological theory and the empirical study in a specific local context extends the concepts of art by illuminating its social contexts with its global and regional connections (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 21).

Hans Belting and Anna Buddensieg, both researchers of the Global Art and the Museum project (GAM) at the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM, Karlsruhe), argue, "Today, art production with its cultural diversity addresses the curator as an ethnographer. At the same time, the ethnographer acts as an art critic." (Belting/Buddensieg 2013: 30). Given the changes in the globalized art world and the dissemination of the biennial format, Belting and other scholars brought up a debate about the concept of global art and developed global art studies. According to Belting and Buddensieg, global art, "presents itself as contemporary, in a chronological, symbolical, and even ideological sense. Thus, twenty-first-century art testifies to worldwide contemporaneity without limits of the kind imposed by the western privilege of history." (ibid.: 28). Global art does not strive to represent a new context, but rather a deconstruction of context through a critical perspective on art concepts defined in terms of inclusion and exclusion (Belting 2009: 40). While Western hegemony is countered by global art and by multiple identities creating art, the local and the regional is reevaluated (Weibel 2013: 27).

As stated by art critic and curator Sabine Vogel, biennials often need to meet local as well as global expectations. They should create bridges between the local particularities and global perspectives. Thus, biennials reflect the local and create a global platform at the same time (Vogel 2010: 9). The site-specific anthropological approach allows me to examine the local particularities of Kochi-Muziris Biennale with its regional and global connections. The situated ethnographic fieldwork facilitates an in-depth examination of the contemporary art biennials regarding equality of art production while criticizing hegemonies (Fillitz 2015: 312).

I discuss this phenomenon based on empirical data collected during my ethnographic field research at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) from 11 December 2018 to 2 February 2019. In those weeks, I conducted qualitative interviews and informal talks with exhibiting Indian artists, curatorial assistants, art mediators and scholars. At the same time, I recorded participant observations at the venues of the Biennale. During my ethnographic field research, I observed the activities at the KMB to gain insights into the various forms of knowledge and social practices within the large-scale contemporary art event. I have collected qualitative data (interviews and participant observations) for five weeks at the venues of the KMB in Kochi (11 December 2018 until 23 December 2018 and 1 January 2019 until 20 January 2019), two days at Sri Chitra Art Gallery, Napier Museum and College of Fine Arts in Thiruvananthapuram (30th December 2018 and 31st December 2018) and one week at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and India Art Fair in New Delhi (28th January 2018 until 2nd February 2019).

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale serves as a case study for the newly emerging discursive biennials. My research focus is on the local particularities, practices of site-specific engagement between art and the city of Fort Kochi as well as the discursive and inclusive approach of the exhibition format. A full discussion of the Biennale institution lies beyond the scope of this study. It provides insights into the possibilities of on-site research, broadening the context of the global biennial phenomenon through in-depth investigations of local particularities. As mentioned above, this thesis is meant to contribute to the field of Anthropology of Art and the academic discourse about the proliferation of biennials. The case study of the fourth Kochi Muziris Biennale sets out to explore the biennial format through ethnographic research.

My thesis is composed of eight chapters. Chapter One considers methods and sources of my ethnographic field research, including my research interest and field approach, the process of qualitative data collection and analysis as well as an overview of the research data. This should provide an insight into my research process and give an impression of my interview partners and observations. The second and third chapters highlight theoretical dimensions of the research. Chapter Two contextualizes the category of art and the process of exhibition-making, laying out the anthropological approach of the research. The third chapter focusses on the key theoretical concepts of “art worlds”, “contemporary art” and “global art”. Chapter Four examines the exhibition format of the biennial, providing background information on the development of contemporary art biennials, discussing the various discourses among biennial professionals and the new typologies of the discursive exhibition practice. This chapter attempts to assess discourses, practices and institutional processes of the global exhibition form. Chapter

Five outlines the situational context of my research field – the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. I give a brief overview of the recent history of contemporary art in India and the development of the Indian Biennale as well as an introduction to the Foundation of the KMB. The sixth chapter presents the findings of my case study on the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2018-19, focussing on four key themes. First, I consider the curator's position and curatorial frame. Second, the exhibition infrastructure, its influence on the "biennale city" and vice versa is illustrated. In a third step selected art projects are presented, concentrating on local particularities, critical perspectives and site-specificities. The last section of the empirical part investigates the venue of the Pavilion as platform for discussion and dialogue. Chapter Seven draws together the analyses of my research results and addresses each research question in turn. The eighth and final chapter summarizes the thesis and considers its contribution to the academic discourse around contemporary art biennials.

Throughout this paper, the term "contemporary art" will be used in its broadest sense to refer to the art of the second half of the 20th century and the 21st century. The term "biennial" is used in this thesis to refer to large-scale international exhibitions of contemporary art which recur at regular intervals – though not necessarily biannually (Niemojewski 2010: 90). The term "Biennale" is used to designate the specific biennial in Kochi, India. "Discursive exhibition-making" is used to refer to new typologies of exhibition practices within biennial institutions. The notion of "discursive exhibition" in the specific regional context of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale will be evaluated throughout this paper.

1. The Ethnographic Field Research

The ethnographic field research is the key method of Cultural and Socialanthropology. The situated ethnographic field research allowed me to examine the format of the Biennale in the specific local context of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry in Kochi, Kerala, India. Within two months, I was able to collect comprehensive data and to gain profound insights into the different discourses around the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018. The basic concept of the ethnographic approach is the empirical study of social environments, social practices, and institutional procedures. Observing people's activities in a specific situational or institutional context is the constitutive element of ethnographic research. The constant presence of the researcher on-site offers insights into the various forms of knowledge and social practices and the logic and dynamics of the research field. By doing this, it requires a fundamental interest in the confrontation with the social reality of a field (Breidensteiner et al. 2013: 7). By considering the particularities of social interaction, ethnographic research on contemporary art institutions can provide an insight into the constellation of interpretations, practices, and discourses, which are largely ignored in art historical and theoretical debates (Kompatsiaris 2017: 86).

1.1. Research Interest and Field Approach

In 2016, I spent one month in Kerala participating in an art project PUJA led by the Munich concept artist Ekkeland Goetze. During a *panchakarma* Ayurvedic treatment, we collected the ash of the *puja*, a daily Hindu prayer ritual performed by Dr. Vijith Sasidhar, an Ayurvedic doctor and *brahman*. The ash was printed on paper and exhibited in Munich's "Haus der Kunst" as part of Goetze's art project "An Image of the Earth". I found the collaboration with an artist fascinating and noticed the parallels between ethnographic and artistic practice. In this project, both – the artist and the anthropologist – dealt with local specificities, researched their contexts, and documented it in a certain way. The observations resulted in prints by the artist and photos, videos, and notes by me, the anthropologist. I began to perceive artists, art practices, the works of arts, and their viewer as actors within cultural, social, and political discourses. During my stay in Vaikom, Kerala, which was located close to Kochi, I also got to know the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and started to follow their activities on social media. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012 was the first Biennale of international contemporary art in India. The event is still young and yet the most significant art exhibition in India and the largest contemporary art festival in Asia (URL 2).

Since I know the Venice Biennale, the new biennial has aroused my interest, and I wanted to find out how the contemporary exhibition format in Kochi is designed. At the time, I didn't realize how widespread the biennial format was already all over the world and that Venice Biennale was only the beginning of a global phenomenon. Starting with the reading of Charlotte Bydler's *The Global Art World Inc.* (2004), Partha Mitter's *Indian Art* (2001), and Bakke's and Peterson's *Anthropology of the Arts* (2017) and my resulting concept, I applied for *Kurzfristige Wissenschaftliche Auslandsstipendien (KWA)* scholarship of the University of Vienna. I asked Kavita Singh, Professor of art history and dean at the School of Arts and Aesthetics of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, to be my host institution. Kavita Singh was also part of the KBF jury team that elected Anita Dube as a curator of the fourth biennial. I informed staff members of the KMB and exhibiting artists about my research interest to establish first contacts. I was able to arrange some interview appointments in advance, which facilitated access to my research field and the collection of data.

1.2. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

I combined different types of data to examine the field from distinct perspectives, which allows me to draw a complex picture of the research subject. Central to the empirical data collection was the embedding in a constant participant observation throughout the whole research (Breidensteiner et al. 2015: 34f). *Participant observation* is considered a fundamental and defining method of anthropological research. This method forms the starting point for collecting any kind of data (DeWalt/DeWalt: 1f). In my case, the participant observation provided the context for taking *infrastructure field notes*, getting into touch with interlocutors, having *informal talks*, conducting *semi-structured interviews*, and using *sound and visual documentation*. The data collection and evaluation process are based on four ethnographic principles: (1) object of research: forms of knowledge and social practices, (2) direct fieldwork experience, (3) integrative research approach: the combination of various data types, (4) textualization of the data and verbalization of a social phenomenon (Breidensteiner et al. 2013: 31ff).

The reader "Anthropology of the Arts" (2017) written by the anthropologists Peterson Bakke and Marina Peterson describes specific research tools for anthropologists examining social contexts of art production, reception, and circulation, which provided useful ethnographic approaches for data gathering. In addition to the collected data from interviews and observations, the publications of the KBF, which I was able to acquire on-site, were essential

sources for analysis. These include the exhibition Short Guide (2018) edited by the curator and her curatorial assistant and the KBF's newsletter "Kochi Contemporary" (2018) and the KBF's Annual Reports on activities, programming, and financial accounting. Also, the Impact Report by KPMG provides an in-depth analysis of the far-reaching socio-economic and cultural impact of the KMB and their education and outreach programs. Although the report does not yet include the fourth edition, as KPMG drafted it in 2017, it contains more extensive quantitative surveys of residents, visitors, and artists. It provides information on sponsorship funding and economic impacts concerning tourism and urban development. Another abundant source of data would be information and presentations disseminated through social media channels by the KBF, which I didn't include as my focus is on the field approach, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

1.2.1. Participant Observations and Infrastructure Field notes

I conducted participant and focused observations at the Biennale's venues to explore the practices and discourses around art. By taking infrastructure field notes, I observed the art venues and performances paying attention to its infrastructure, which includes the arrangement of the artworks, the provided information as well as the histories behind the buildings. On the one hand, this ethnographic analysis brings into focus the different people interacting at the art spaces – visitors, artists, donors, guards, curators, volunteers. On the other hand, it helps to analyse the meaning of contemporary art and the role of art exhibitions in society (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 277). The infrastructure field notes are the basis for the analysis of the curatorial practice and design of the Biennale.

I conducted *participant observation*, with a focus on participation and making (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 328). In this context, I took part in "Let's Talk" events, in "Free Public Tours" by art mediators, "Artists' Cinema", "Art by Children (ABC)" programs, "Music of Muziris" and performances. Especially participating in the "Let's Talk" program, where artists, curators, scholars, and visitors discuss topics around art, politics, and society, was central to examine in which ways the Biennale creates a space for dialogue and how far the public is integrated and taking part in this dialogue. Conducting participant observation in one workshop of the ABC-Art Room and in "Free Public Tours" helped me to pay attention to the pedagogy of the curatorial practice and to observe how visitors engage with the artworks and how they participate in artmaking. During movie screenings of "Artists' Cinema", the concerts of "Music of Muziris" and the performances, I observed the audience and their reactions to the events. I conducted *audience observations* in the various venues of the Biennale. The audience

observation aims to describe audience interactions, the arrangement of the exhibition space, and its relation to the audience. The anthropology of arts follows the idea to understand the significance of an event, both of itself and in connection with broader social formation. It is essential to study the audience, as they influence the constitution of the meaning of an event. Many audience formations reflect and reinforce normative social orders. At the same time, subcultures have the potential to overcome class, race, and gender and demonstrate that engagement with art practices is integral to life in general. Therefore, it is crucial to observe those engagements to understand how and why art plays a role as a social process (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 223ff). I focused on the nature of the audience, their engagement with the art projects, and their activities at the venues, including cafés, restaurants, and other sitting areas arranged by the Biennale.

1.2.3. Semi-structured Interviews and Informal Talks

Semi-structured face to face interviewing facilitates the collection of new information and provides flexibility to explore topics in-depth with interviews (Bernard/Gravlee 1998: 336). The semi-structured interview is open-ended but follows an interview guide with a list of questions and specific topics that need to be covered (Bernard 2011: 210). I prepared four interview guidelines for the artist interviews, curator interviews, interviews with art mediators, and the interviews with art scholars. Before each meeting with my interlocutors, I added to the guidelines some specific questions concerning the CV, artworks, or publications of the interview partner. During the interview, I followed the questions grouped by general topics to make sure to cover my central questions. At the same time the interview provided open space for me and the interlocutor to follow new questions and topics. The main issues guiding the conversation were: the personal definition and relationship to art; the meaning of contemporary art for society; the involvement and role of the public; the participation in and organization of Kochi-Muziris Biennale; the perception and potentials of the Indian Biennale concerning local and global contexts. All interview partners proved to be very open and communicative, bringing in their perspectives and ideas. The 15 interviews conducted lasted 50 minutes on average. After the interview recording, the interlocutors and I often ended up discussing and exchanging personal opinions.

Informal interviewing or informal talks are uncontrolled and unstructured. After each day in the field, I tried to reproduce the conversations heard during the day and protocolled them. Informal discussions help to establish initial contacts and are used throughout the ethnographic fieldwork to gather more extensive information and to uncover new significant issues that might

have been overlooked (Bernard 2011: 211). Informal talks with visitors, artists, locals, and volunteers offered a wide range of perspectives. In the relaxed, conversational setting, the interlocutors tended to criticize more openly, express personal opinions and emotions. Further, several informal talks before or after an interview created a new level of trust. This I could observe, especially by having casual conversations and a semi-structured interview with the same person.

1.2.4. Sound and Visual Documentation

The anthropologist Margarete Mead criticized ethnographic research became depended just on words and emphasised the significance of using the visual as a tool for research as well as research data (Bernard/Gravlee 1998: 430). During my observations at the exhibition venues, I documented the audience, the artworks, and spaces through photography, video, and sound recordings. The visual material serves to support my recorded data, especially the infrastructure field notes. It helped me to visualize the infrastructure of the Biennale, the exhibition layout, the curatorial design, as well as the interactions between artists, visitors, and staff members of the KMB. Besides, it helped me to engage myself with the field by capturing details and changing my perspective through the lens or the sound recorder.

1.2.5. Reflection on Research Process and Position in the Field

The ethnographic research is characterized by a constant change between internal and external perspectives, between familiar and unfamiliar, and its ability to permeate those perceptions. The quality of ethnographic observation is based on simultaneous actions of approaching and distancing oneself (Breidensteiner et al. 2013: 68). This interplay between closeness and distance influenced my research, as I considered myself as researcher generating and analysing data on the research field. During this process, I had to remain determined, contact institutions, and interview partners several times, keep on asking questions, dig more in-depth with the risk of annoying my contact persons. While being in the middle of the field, I distanced myself through my research practice to get a clearer picture of the events, activities, and interactions, which other participants might ignore or overlook (Breidensteiner et al. 2013: 7f).

At the same time, the people in the field perceived me as a tourist, visitor, or artist, sometimes considered me as a journalist when they noticed my sound recorder. I always replied that I am a scholar doing a master thesis research. My answer often attracted interest and admiration or astonishment, mainly because I travelled from Austria to India to conduct research. This general interest and curiosity of the participants enabled me to have informal talks, which provided

useful information, invitations to other events and offers for having a meal or cup of tea together or a walk through the venues. In contrast to visitors and exhibiting artists, who were to be found frequently in the exhibition rooms during the opening week, it was challenging to win over members of the Biennale organization for an interview, as they were swamped during the entire biennial. I could at least manage to interview the curatorial assistant, and two art mediators took time for an extensive conversation. That is why the public discussions at the Pavilion, in which the director, the curator, and other members of the Biennial participated, were significant and informative.

Mostly my informants were also interested in an exchange. For example, the artist Chandan Gomes perceives the Biennale as a space where you can meet people from different parts of society and exchange ideas. Pupils and international visitors bring various discourses to the artworks, while at exhibitions in New Delhi, he would always meet the same people and have the same conversations (Chandan Gomes, 14 Dec 2018). In this context, I would also like to stress the matter of reciprocity (Breidensteiner et al. 2013: 69). To contribute my part, I promised my research partners to keep them updated about my research results. A future aim would be to publish an article.

1.2.6. Qualitative Content Analysis

According to Mayring, the purpose of qualitative content analysis is to systematically analyse texts by editing the material step-by-step with theory-guided category systems developed on the data (Mayring 2002: 114). Through structuring content analysis, I elaborated specific aspects of the data and examined the material according to predetermined structuring criteria to get an overview of the main contents and to build categories. The structuring content analysis includes the definition of categorical groups, identification of specific passages regarding the categories, and the description of encoding rules (Mayring 2002: 118ff). The analysed material includes protocols of participant observation and informal talks, and interview transcripts as well as the publications by the KBF. After revising the data and the theoretical framework, I analysed the data according to the typologies of the curatorial practice with a focus on the discursive exhibition format and the discourses around contemporary art and society. In connection with the discursive exhibition, major categories were exhibition infrastructure, audience engagement, artists engagement, and site-specificities. Within the context of discourses, the main categories were formed along with the critical discursive capacity of the biennial, its potential of inclusivity and accessibility, and the processes of knowledge production.

1.3. Introducing the Research Data

The data collected during my fieldwork encompasses protocols of participant observation during the various programs of the KMB including talks, conferences, performances, concerts, movie screenings, educational interventions, and workshops; infrastructure field notes of the exhibition venues; protocols of informal talks with locals and tourists in Fort Kochi, visitors, participants, volunteers and employees of the Biennale; personal notes recorded in the fieldwork diary; sound recordings, photos, and videos imaging the exhibition layout, the artworks, the audience, and events; literature, video and photo resources available from KMB and interview partners; audio recordings of semi-structured interviews. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews with 19 interviewees were recorded and lasted 50 minutes on average: 8 artist interviews with nine artists exhibiting at the Biennale; 1 interview with the curatorial assistant of the KMB; 2 interviews with art mediators of KMB; 4 interviews with art scholars. I recorded 7 Let's Talk events and documented them in the format of field notes. I participated in the workshop "Gond Art and Storytelling" held by Subash Vyam and Mansingh Vyam – traditional Gond artists exhibiting at the KMB – and recorded my observations in the format of field notes, photos, and sound recordings. Further, I made participant observations during Free Public Tours at Aspinwall (the main building of KMB). To get a broader picture of the Indian contemporary art world, I made observations at the Sri Chitra Art Gallery, Napier Museum, and the College of Fine Arts in Thiruvananthapuram. Finally, I visited the Jawaharlal Nehru University, various art galleries, and the India Art Fair in New Delhi.

1.3.1. Interlocutors

My first interview partner Chandan Gomes, a 31-year-old photographer from Delhi exhibiting at the KMB, proved to be an essential source of information and door opener. In the first week of the Biennale, I conducted one detailed semi-structured interview with him. We had several informal talks, and he introduced me to his artist friends and invited me to side events in Fort Kochi. During my stay in Delhi, we met again, and he showed me around his hometown, including his favourite places, his digital work studio, and art galleries. By accompanying Chandan Gomes, I got insights into the daily life and perspectives of a young artist comprising the personal and social environment, the process of artmaking, the self-image as a photographer, and his personal view on the Indian contemporary art scene. One must mention that during this time, Chandan Gomes attracted the attention of the Indian art scene due to his exhibition at the KMB and his nomination for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize.

During the KMB Opening Week, I conducted seven more semi-structured interviews with 8 exhibiting Indian artists. One was done with 40-year-old Bapi Das, who is showing embroidered compositions depicting the everyday tasks from his former life as an autorickshaw driver in Kolkata. His friend Kollo Roy, a social scientist, translated from Bengali to English and added his view on Bapi Das' work and life. Later, I had an informal talk with Bapi Das' mentor, the painter Avijit Dutta from Kolkata, together with his friends Kollo Roy and the gallerist Abhinav Bansal from Jaipur. Bapi Das and his companions described the success of exhibiting at the Biennale as an untrained artist from a lower class practicing an art form that originated from the traditionally feminine technique of hand embroidery.

Another interview was recorded with Arunkumar HG, a 51-year-old artist from Karnataka, who exhibited sculptures made of industrial waste and printed portraits on recycled wood. He explained to me in detail the content and material used in his work, which should address environmental issues such as the agrarian crisis and contribute to a discourse on sustainable living.

The interview conducted with Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, a 55-year-old artist and art professor of photography based in the USA, was mainly about the artist's migratory history, "living between cultures" – as she calls it, and its influence on her work, which focusses on historical issues reflecting conflicting and fluid identities. During our interview, she also discussed the feminist framework of the Biennale and the current "#MeToo" debate around the Kochi-Biennale co-founder Riyas Komu and the curator of Goa's Serendipity Arts Festival Subodh Gupta – both renown Indian artists.

The documentary filmmakers Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar, living and working together for the past 30 years in Mumbai, gave insights into a more inter-disciplinary art practice. Both filmmakers are social scientists teaching at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and documenting urban spaces and social groups, which are overlooked in popular and academic discourses.

The 32-year-old photographer Vicky Roy was interviewed accompanied by his girlfriend Punyasil Yonzon and Vinit Gupta, a friend and photographer. The interlocutor explained the process of becoming a photographer against the backdrop of his childhood as a runaway living on the streets of New Delhi and about his use of photography to raise money for charity.

Afrah Shafiq, a 30-year-old multimedia artist and art teacher from Bangalore, talked in the interview about the meaning of feminism and the pedagogic dimension concerning her artwork

and the KMB. She also underscored her extensive literature research, which is fundamental for her art practice.

The last artist interview, I conducted with Mochu, a 36-year-old video artist born in Kerala, living and working in Delhi and Istanbul. He had a more critical perspective on the Biennale questioning the exhibition layout and themes and the organization of the event. The eight artist interviews provide personal perspectives on contemporary art practice in India, the concept and significance of the KMB, and the role of the public within both contexts.

During the Let's Talk event "Deconstructing the Curatorial Frame" with the curator Anita Dube and the curatorial-assistants Anushka Rajendran and John Xaviers, I got information about the curatorial model and process as well as the practical and theoretical concepts behind the title "Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life". In an interview with Anushka Rajendran, an independent curator, art writer, and Ph.D. student in Visual Studies, I recorded more details on the development and implementation of the curatorial layout and its organizational problems.

In the framework of the Free Public Tour, which took place every day in English and Malayalam at 11 AM and 3 PM, and two semi-structured interviews with art mediators, I gained insights in the KMB's art pedagogy, following the principle of "pleasure and pedagogy" and a self-determined audience. I interview two art mediators, 37-years-old Arun S. Kumar, musician and freelance journalist from Kochi, Kerala, and 24-years-old Khushboo Patel, an architecture student from Vadodara Gujarat. They gave insights into the manner of work and cooperation between the KMB's staff members, explained their view of the exhibition's infrastructure and artworks, and how the audience engages with them. The mediation team received specialized instructions about the display, had meetings with exhibiting artists, and helped the rest of the team to produce the exhibition as well as the programming at the Biennale. Several informal talks with volunteers broadened my view on the KMB's organization, as they were pointing out problems within their working environment.

Besides the interviews with exhibiting artists and staff members, the in-depth interviews with art scholars are an essential component of the collected data. In Thiruvananthapuram, capital of Kerala, I met Chandran T.V. at the College of Fine Arts. He is an art critic and professor of art history and was part of the anti-KMB protests. The protest was led by Keralan artists and scholars during the first edition of the Biennale to criticize the lacking support and involvement of Keralan artists. In this context, Chandran T.V. published an article titled "What is Wrong with (Kochi) Biennale?" (see T.V. 2012) shedding light on the (economic) motivations of the

Biennale Foundation and criticizing the Biennale format in general. There are more publications on the Biennale by Keralan art critics, but only available in Malayalam.

The second scholar interview I recorded with Sandip K Luis in Fort Kochi, as he was visiting the Biennale coming from Delhi. He is originally from Kerala and a research student at the Visual Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics (JNU). In the framework of the first Biennale edition, he published a critical paper, arguing that “there is a shift away from the principles of dissent and radical egalitarianism in the course of contemporary Indian art and that the biennale is an exemplary case of this turn” (Luis 2014: 55).

Two more scholar interviews have been conducted with professors of the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the JNU Campus in New Delhi. I met Kaushik Bhaumik, who is specialized in Asian cinema and Contemporary Art and Media Cultures, and Parul Dave-Mukherji with research and graduate teaching focus on art theory and globalization, Indian Art Historiography, Comparative Aesthetics, and Visual Culture. Her publications (co-edited) include *Arts and aesthetics in a globalizing world* (2014) and *InFlux- Contemporary Art in Asia* (2013), which are relevant literature resources for my research. The interviews provide expert knowledge on Indian art history, Indian contemporary art, and art theory, as well as a critical understanding of the Biennale format.

1.3.2. Observations

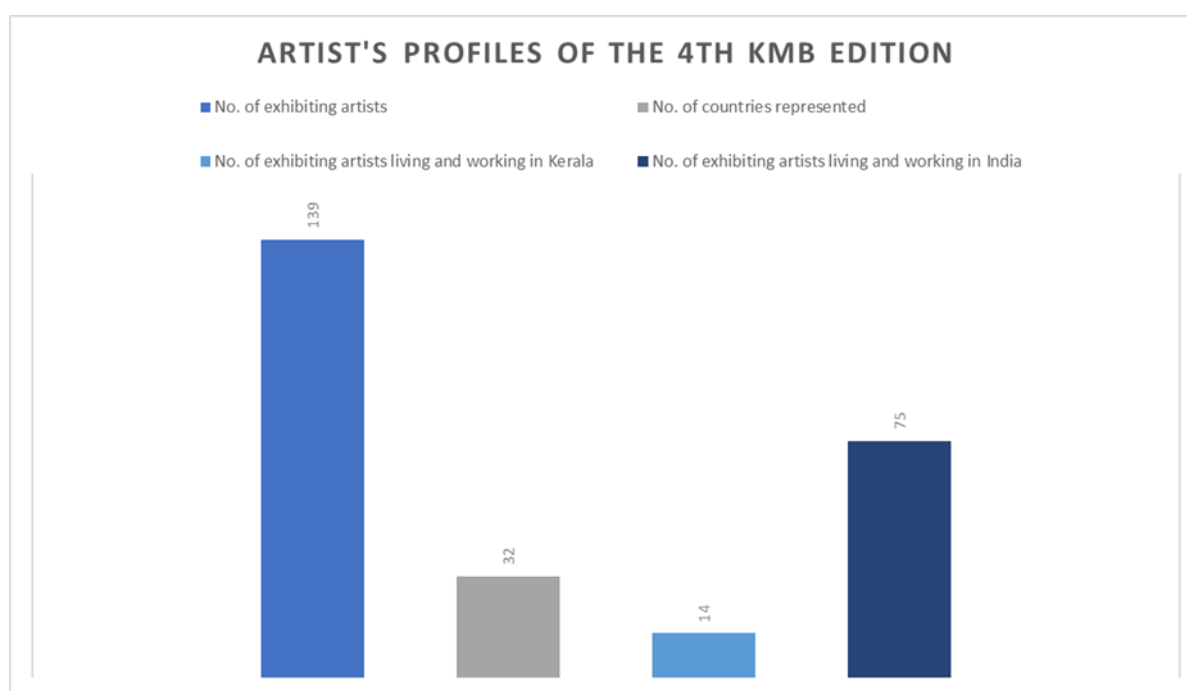


Figure 2. Artist's Profiles at KMB 2018, numbers have been derived from KMB Short Guide 2018

The semi-structured interviews are embedded in extensive observations, including informal talks. During the whole research period, I recorded observations at the ten main exhibition venues of the Biennale, showing the art projects of 139 artists from 32 countries.

Parallel to the main event, I visited the Student's Biennale exhibiting 109 projects of art students from SAARC countries at seven different venues, and the nine official collaterals that took place in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry at the time of the Biennale, but independent of the main curatorial project. My field of observation was spatially defined by the infrastructure of the Biennale, which mainly consists of ten exhibition sites (see Figure 3). The KMB Map guided me through the Biennale city and was very important in order not to lose orientation in the different and diverse exhibition venues. The Short Guide of the Exhibition was also a helpful guide for my research providing information about the exhibited art works, artists and the structure of the display.

For every exhibited project there was an empty page in the short guide where you could leave notes. So, I could use the exhibition guide for observations and field notes and at the same time I had an overview of the whole exhibition. For instance, after my interview with Chandan Gomes I wrote down most important information and observations of his exhibition space. Turning back one page I could look up the official curatorial description of the artist's work.

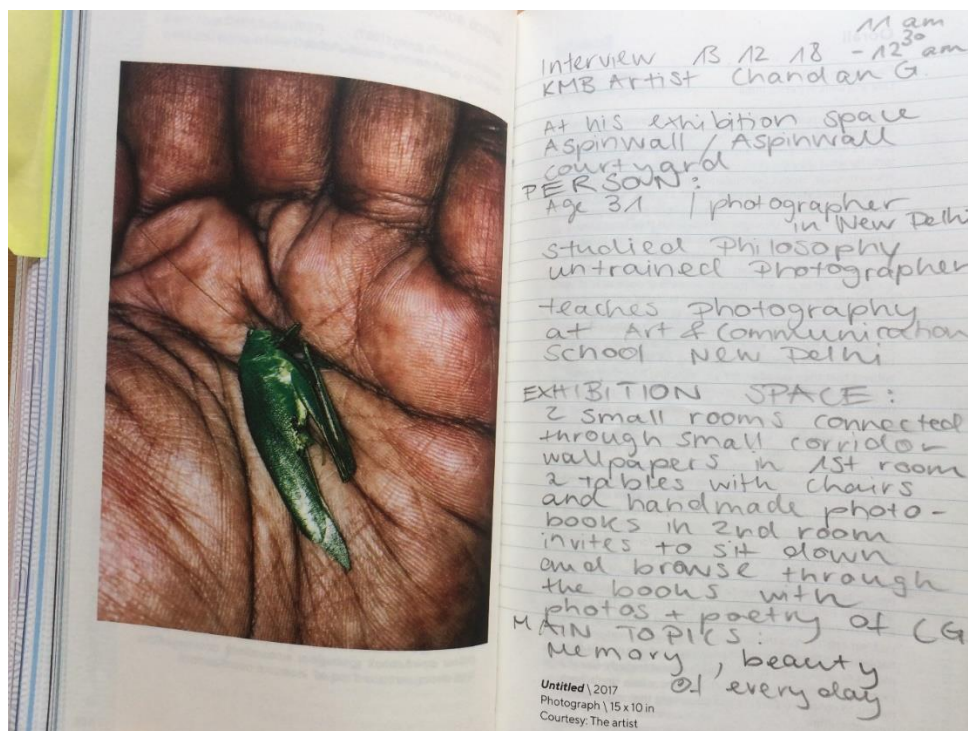


Figure 3. KMB Short Guide with notes on exhibition observation and interlocutor Chandan Gomes

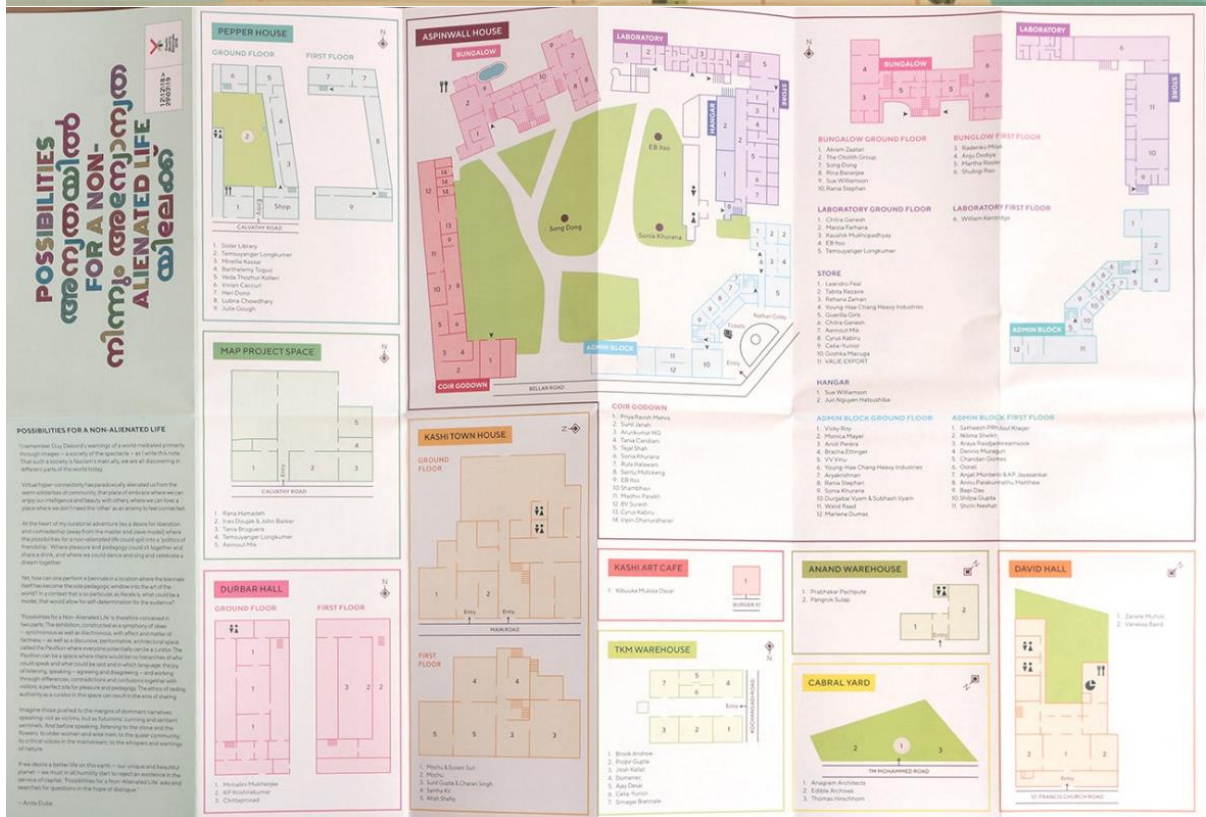


Figure 4. Map of Kochi Muziris Biennale venues 2018

The focal point of participant observation was the Cabral Yard. The venue hosted two food courts of Edible Archive and Kudumbashree, the ABC's Children Art Room and the Pavilion, "a multi-functional structure that hosts programming" as well as the "Knowledge Laboratory" envisioned by curator Anita Dube (URL 3). The Kudumbashree Mission, the women empowerment program of Kerala, was a vital food partner of the Biennale (URL 4). The food court Café Kudumbashree was run by around 15 women of the mission, serving traditional Keralan food for visitors and the daily free lunch for volunteers. The Edible Archive Project seeks to highlight the diversity of food culture and arts. They are "bringing them to a wider audience through a conceptual space, where chefs from across India are encouraged to experiment with indigenous rice varieties using their repertoire of skills rooted in their journeys and culinary traditions." (URL 5). At this main venue, I could observe the interaction of the visitors and the employees, having conversations, food, and drinks, and taking part in ABC's and Pavilion's programs. It was interesting to investigate the engagement of the participants with space, its architecture, and its infrastructure. An area that the curator describes as discursive, performative, architectural, and with no hierarchies, a perfect place for pleasure and pedagogy (Dube 2018: 24). An ideal site for my research to examine in which ways this venue creates a space for dialogue and reflects discourses within contemporary art worlds.

2. Contextualisation of Art and Exhibition-Making

This work approaches the category of art as a social force and examines the processes around exhibiting art. Anthropology is different from other disciplines studying art, in the way that it continually illuminates the contexts of their subject. As a category, art is inherently and intrinsically social and cannot be understood separate from society. Anthropological theories examine the structures which shape and define the meaning-making through art instead of assuming art's meaning a priori. In the same way, concerns over the long-established distinction of Western and non-Western art have influenced the definitional debates about the actual category of art (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 2).

Anthropologists of art and editors of the reader “The Anthropology of Art” (2006) Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins stress that an anthropological conception of art comprises “the history of this concept in cross-cultural encounters and the contemporary conditions that are the inheritance of history.” (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 13). Historical and cultural processes characterize the conception of art. In this sense, altering notions of art and culture shape anthropological approaches to the subject of art (Svasek 2007: 16). Morphy and Perkins relate the notion of art to the two meanings of the word ‘culture’:

[...] culture as a way of life or body of ideas and knowledge, and culture as the metaphysical essence of society, incorporating standards by which the finest products of society are judged. [...] Art in the first sense is associated with bodies of knowledge, technologies, and representational practices that provide insights into the whole lifeworld of a society. Art in the second sense has been seen as a product of a particular stage of Euro-American history. (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 1)

Before one can consider the practices and knowledge production around art, one must be aware of the historical processes behind the emergence of the concept. To that end, I give a short reflection on the development of the anthropology of art over time. Anthropological theories from the beginning of the discipline are introduced to reflect on the longstanding concern of whether all cultures produce art or not critically. This will shed light on the former distinction between indigenous art and fine arts and the previous dualism between art history and ethnology. I outline an anthropological approach to art that places art in its social context and highlights the interdisciplinarity of the field. Anthropological perspectives on art should reflect the changing notion of art and its multifaceted approach. Besides, I examine the practice of exhibition-making to understand how spatiality and discourses contextualize artworks and which role exhibition-makers – curators play in this process.

2.1. Anthropological Perspectives on Art

From 1850 to 1975, anthropological perspectives were influenced by historical processes such as the evolvment of colonial empires, the formation of nation-states, and the belief in scientific objectivism. Debates about art were framed by definitions of culture, which represented problematic ideas about the history and the nature of human production. The evolutionist perception of art decontextualized artefacts by displaying them as examples of prototypical types that describe levels of progression from the simple to the complex (Svasek 2007: 16ff). In the nineteenth century, art and material culture played a significant role in anthropology, as the discipline conjointly developed with collecting of artefacts, with cabinets of curiosity and the exoticism of Otherness. Evolutionist anthropologists, such as Pitt Rivers (1906), Tylor (1871, 1878), and Fraser (1925), developed evolutionary schemas in which art and other material culture objects were included (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 3). Their analysis reinforced the Western discourse of fine arts as a form of high culture and racial superiority. By the creation of hierarchical classification of racial groups, they justified the colonial system and racial prejudices (Svasek 2007: 35f).

Anthropologists such as Haddon (1894) and Balfour (1888) analysed form and style, studying the development of decorative motives over time. Morphy and Perkins argue that their method of analysing sequences overtime was relatively independent of the evolutionary theories and more connected to archaeology and art history. Still, the sequences themselves supported evolutionary theory (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 5). The American anthropologist of art Franz Boas equally focused his analysis on the style, form, and technique of non-European art, but was fundamentally opposed to evolutionism (Svasek 2007: 23ff). In his book “Primitive Art” (1927) he stated two principles for investigating life among primitive people: “one the fundamental sameness of mental processes in all races and all cultural forms of the present day; the other the consideration of every cultural phenomenon as the result of historical happenings.” (Boas 1955: 1). Until the late 1940s, anthropologists, in general, failed to examine the social conditions in which specific forms, styles, and designs developed (Svasek 2007: 25).

As anthropology moved into the twentieth-century evolutionary theory came under heavy criticism. With Radcliff-Brown (1952, 1977) and Malinowski (1922, 1979), the discipline’s focus has been shifted to fieldwork-based studies and structural functionalism. Museum based studies, as well as data and collections produced by missionaries, traders, or government officials, lost their significance. Radcliff Brown stressed the role of the synchronic study of social organization and successfully buried the data of evolutionary theory and their difficulty.

As the study of material culture was conceived being linked to the more rigid and simplistic aspects of evolutionary theory, material culture and art became separated from dominant academic discourse, and the collected objects remained unnoticed in the museum basements. Social anthropologist neglected to benefit from a great potential source of data, and museum anthropologists missed to relate their objects with the society that created them. Thus, objects declared as art were often distanced from their cultural and social context and judged according to Western criteria and in line with Western categories (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 6f).

In 1960 the interest in art among anthropologists revived, as “a broader understanding of the role of material culture in the process of exchange and value creation began to emerge.” (ibid. 2006: 9). The renewal of interest in art was due to the changes in the anthropological research and because Western art and art theory began to adopt anthropological thinking (ibid. 2006: 9). The formerly disregarded material culture objects “began to be seen as integral to the processes of reproducing social relations and of developing affective relations with the world” (ibid. 2006: 10). Scholars started to view art “as a way of doing, a way of behaving as a member of society” (D’Azevedo 1958: 7).

The highly limited Euro-American conception of art made it, until recently, for some anthropologist, a problematic field of study. In contrast to subjects such as kinship, religion, magic, gender, law, and economy, art has continued to be absent from definitional debates in anthropology, for over a century. Nevertheless, the anthropological perspective often had a significant impact on the discussion of art. Art has been located on the margins for a long time. However, it had the positive effect of being inherently an interdisciplinary field of research, which engages with ideas outside from the limitations of the core discipline and, in many cases, out from the academy (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 1).

Since the 1990s, there have been new and multiple anthropological towards contemporary art. The original thrives within the discipline started with Shelton’s and Coote’s (1992) claim for aesthetic anthropology. Marcus and Myers (1995) shift the focus from studying art to the investigation of the art world. They examined mainly the art world of the United States, the processes of inclusion, exclusion, and circulation of artworks from other parts of the world. In this regard, they define art as “a space in which difference, identity, and cultural value are being produced and contested.” (Marcus/Myers 1995: 11). One of the significant and most influential contributors to the anthropology of art, Alfred Gell (1998), introduced a general anthropological theory of art, focussing on the social relationships and the agency of artworks. Schneider and Wright (2006, 2010, 2013) explore the encounters between art and anthropology and call for

engagement between art practices and anthropological theories: "Artists and anthropologists are practitioners who appropriate from, and represent, others. Although their representational practices have been different, both books and artworks are creative additions to the world; both are complex translations of other realities." (Schneider/Wright 2006: 26). Present-day's anthropological research on art is shaped by the inclusion of art history and art theoretical discourses. Art is more than ever an interdisciplinary field of study (Fillitz, van der Grijp 2018: 3).

The anthology "Anthropology of the Arts" (2017) edited by Gretchen Bakke and Marina Peterson approaches art "as a multifaceted process that has long been treated by anthropologists as inseparable from other aspects of culture and society." (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 1). The reader encompasses the arts more broadly, compiling painting, sound, performance, video, and film. According to Bakke and Peterson, the anthropological perspective is less concerned with the individual work of art than with an analysis of social, political, and historical processes that constitute the context for making and engaging with art. To analyse those processes carefully is necessary to "understanding art in the present." (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 1). Anthropologist Maruska Svasek critically introduces in her book "Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production" (2007) anthropological theories on art and explores the production, consumption, and distribution of art as a social and global process. Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins, editors of the reader "The Anthropology of Art" (2006), give an overview of theoretical debates around the anthropology of art and argue for a cross-cultural conception of art to reduce cultural bias. All these contributions put emphasis on the social context of art, referring to Alfred Gell's "Art and Agency" (1998). The social anthropologist and significant contributor to the field of anthropology of art argue that anthropology of art should focus on social relationships, "on the social context of art production, circulation, and reception." (Gell 1998: 3).

Bakke and Peterson claim that art practices and objects are often constituted as "art in context", which cannot be strictly defined or delimited as visual productions or museum objects. Instead, art must be understood "as category of action and as a series of material affordances rather than a set of collectable objects." (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 6). This transient status of art becomes especially visible "when something moves, changes categorization, or resist the defining parameters of 'art'" (ibid.: 2). In this sense, Morphy and Perkins similarly argue that the category of art is very blurred, and the boundaries between art and non-art category are often vague and not always relevant (Morphy/Perkins 2006: 12f). As the notion of art is formed "discursively and in practice", the anthropological focus is on the structures that shape the

meanings around artwork (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 4). In the context of exhibition-making, a central question of the anthropology of art, one should consider how an art event “is meaningful, both in itself and concerning broader social formations.” (ibid.: 223). Further, considering the specificities of engagement with art is essential to understand how and why art is important as a social process (ibid: 224).

2.2. Anthropological Perspectives on Exhibition-Making

Exhibition-making contextualizes art discursively and spatially. Svasek argues that exhibitions are never neutral spatial arrangements because curators of an exhibition try to convey a specific message to the audience and intend to move it in a certain way. By certain practices of collecting and exhibiting, exhibition facilitators have often enforced (and sometimes called into question) prevailing discourses of art. An example of this are museums or galleries that have been established in connection with the politics of nation-building. The exhibited “products of the nation” in symbolic spaces, such as national museums, intended to arouse nationalist feelings among the visitors. Instead of reproducing dominant discourses, in recent years, exhibition practices are used to create space for active dialogues and critical reflection (Svasek 2007: 123f). First, we look back to the example of the first international contemporary art exhibition and the emerging discourses around exhibition-making in relation to this event.

In 1989 the exhibition “Les Magiciens de la terre” took place in the prestigious Musée d’Art Moderne at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. It was organized by the French curator Jean-Hubert Martin and was “the first attempt at a giant, worldwide ecumenical survey of contemporary art in a major art museum” (Hart 1995: 135). The organizers of the show wanted to explore the practices of artists in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, a combined selection of works from those countries with works from the United States and Western Europe. In this context, the organizers announced 50-artists from the “so-called centres” of contemporary art and 50 artists from the “cultural margins” (Buchloh 1989: 150). For the selection of the exhibited works, Martin had travelled around the world, consulting local people. His collection was mainly based on his personal sense of taste and judgment: “Since we are dealing with visual and sensual experience, let’s look at these objects from our own perspective. I intend to select them according to my own history and sensibility” (Martin cited in Buchloh 1989: 152). The decisive factor for him was the ability of the object or picture to convey meaning without the need for additional information. By presenting the works as “art” in the exhibition context, he wanted to offer what he considered a purely aesthetic experiment. The labels included only necessary

information, as is usual in high art exhibitions, and a mark on a world map represented the artist's country of origin. Information about the artist's date and place of birth, region, state, and nationality, as well as the title, size, and materials used in the works, was also given. Various critics responded that „Les Magiciens de la terre“ misrepresented most artworks, as the meanings which they had in their original context were ignored. In an interview with the art historian and curator Benjamin Buchloh, curator Martin defended his approach and responded, “whatever meaning a practice has for its practitioners is not relevant to us if it cannot be communicated to us” (ibid.: 212). He added that it is not possible to avoid an ethnocentric vision, and one must accept this view despite striving for objectivity (ibid.). Martin further noted also wanted “to incorporate into that process the critical thinking which contemporary anthropology provides on the problem of eurocentrism, the relativity of culture and intercultural relations.” (ibid.: 153). Anthropologist James Clifford reacted to Martin’s approach with a critical statement. Clifford presented an alternative approach that recognises subjectivity in exhibition practice but still takes local voices into account. In his opinion, exhibitions should be “translation experiments”, which would try to “keep the discrepancy between different meanings or messages – different contexts around the object – rather than thinking of them simply as art with more or less powerful communicative power” (Clifford 1989: 152).

Although „Les Magiciens de la terre“ was a popular event, the exhibition also displayed the unequal power structures in the global contemporary art world. New exhibition trends aim at a more radical change through active dialogue with the audience, including the involvement of genuine power-sharing and long-term engagements. (Svasek 2007: 143). Clifford suggested that “it is important to resist the tendency of collections to be self-sufficient, to suppress their own historical, economic, and political processes of production” to avoid objective exhibition-making (Clifford 1991: 229). According to Svasek, by exhibiting, artworks lose and gain meanings and can become diverse agents. It is necessary to analyse the objectives and interests of collectors and exhibition facilitators, including their participation in both political and professional practices and discourses. Such enactment of power becomes particularly apparent when an exhibition pursues political objectives. But even if this is not the case, the display of art objects requires selection and interpretation, since most curators want to tell specific stories. Besides, it is crucial to recognize that exhibitions do not necessarily evoke the curator’s ideas in the visiting audience (Svasek 2007: 152). As could be seen by the example of „Les Magiciens de la terre“, a closer look at the exhibition practice can also give insights into the structures of the contemporary art worlds, which are examined in the following chapter.

3. Contemporary Art Worlds

To study the contemporary art event in the specific local context, it is necessary to take a closer look at the global processes of the art world, which shape the framework of the biennial. What constitutes the contemporary art world? What role does contemporary art play in global processes, and vice versa, what influence do global processes have on contemporary art?

Contemporary art has become a social phenomenon, a tool for communication. There is no point in comparing it to what we used to know, because it is dependent on the effects of globalization which are only beginning to discover and whose impact are still struggling to assess. (Navarra 2008: 15)

Gallerist Enrico Navarra points to the processual and social character of contemporary art determined by global developments. During modernism, art was evaluated based on style, form, and ideology, while perspectives on contemporary art are grounded in new and controversial debates around globalization, placemaking, transnational connections or identity (Harris 2011; Green and Gardener 2016; Smith 2009; Osborne 2013; Belting 2009).

According to the artist and social scientist, Robert E. D'Souza globalisation produces a more globalised art world, which is also reflected in the increasing internationalization of Indian art. This lead, on the one hand, to economic pressures from capitalistic market strategies dominated by the West. On the other hand, the globalisation of Indian art brings benefits of the deterritorialization of current centres of global art production. Relations of cultural exchange and value systems of art production are renegotiated, and alternatives are postulated to the current global art framework ruled by Europe and North America (D'Souza 2013: 297pp). In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of international art biennials increased rapidly. Those new biennials have been considered as core format of a universalized art world-system. The globalisation of contemporary art was considered to end the North American domination, and to mark the decentralization of the post-World War II art world-system (Bydler 2004: 150). According to the anthropologist Thomas Fillitz, through globalisation, a plurality of interconnected worlds has become constitutive for contemporary global art. Art is an element of processes of globalisation and produces and contests cultural differences and identities (Fillitz 2015: 301). The concept of global art has been predominantly elaborated by art historians, while scholars in anthropology of art largely remain absent in discussions around global art. Therefore, there is a need for anthropological approaches towards global art and studying contemporary art with a site-specific focus to view the present-day art worlds with its regional and global connections (ibid.: 312). In this context, this chapter discusses discourses

around contemporary art and globalization, to introduce in a next step the theoretical framework of the global art concept.

3.1. Contemporary Art and Globalisation

In “Globalization and Contemporary Art” (2011) Jonathan Harris is exploring the impact of art and artists in an increasing globalized world. Harris highlights that the study of globalization and contemporary art draws on historical, postcolonial and cultural processes and helps to understand the role of art within culture. By that examination one may investigate “how the arts – and culture understood as the life-process of all peoples in their relations of generation and nurture, of work and communication, and political decision making – might contribute to radical, progressive change globally.” (Harris 2011: 15). Similar like Harris, Bydler argues that some scholars of the contemporary art world field may be able to call for “a new temporary pantheon.” (Bydler 2011: 475). Charlotte Bydler analysed in her book “The Global Art World Inc.” (2004) the effects of globalisation in the contemporary art world. Instead of describing the *contemporary* as linear temporality, Bydler claims that “the contemporary designates artworks, discourses, and communities considered to be (positioned at) the global horizon of event”. Comparing it to the imperial time which “was observed in provinces and colonies, the standard time of contemporary art reaches a globally distributed community.” (Bydler 2011: 464). Globalisation increasingly pluralised contemporary art and art history. It seems to have decentralised art and demolished the hegemony of Western art history (Bydler 2010: 383).

In the last twenty years the contemporary art world was growing exponentially (Dumbadze/Hudson 2013: 2). During the exhibition “Les Magiciens de la Terre” in 1989 in Paris, the idea of contemporary art production on a global scale was discussed for the first time. In the same year the Cold war ended which led to the rise of the new economy including multinational corporations (Belting/Buddensieg 2013: 28). The fall of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square protests, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the Solidarity Movement in Poland, the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc – all those events accompanied the accelerated growth of the contemporary art world and also mobilised economic resources for local collectors to become powerful players in the international world. At the same time the cultural and economic developments of the contemporary art scene in post-Tiananmen China evolved independent from the Western economic system and presented a complete excision from the North American and European *hegemony* (Dumbadze/Hudson 2013: 2f). Professor of Global Art, Jonathan Harris argues that the globalisation of the art world led to the “question

of (western) centre and colonial/postcolonial periphery” (Harris 2011: 13). The contemporary art world has run through an expansion of centres and profound institutional adaptations concerning the nature of borders, mobility and global economy. Moreover, the last two decades influenced the perspectives of artists and their critics in the way of how they look at their practices and the world. The art historians Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson stress that contemporary art is informed by global processes and serves as “a tool for comprehending contemporary life” in a globalised world (Dumbadze/Hudson 2013: 3). Equally, the art anthropologists Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave argue that the accelerating movement of people, objects and images require a “globalizing perspective” on contemporary art (Kaur/Dave-Mukherji 2014: 1).

Anthropologists Paul van der Grijp and Thomas Fillitz recently released the volume “An Anthropology of Contemporary Art” (2018) exploring the changes in the art market and global contemporary art through ethnographic methods. The editors are criticising the conception of the “global art world” of contemporary art as a European and North American umbrella term, which neglects the significant transformations within the present field of art. In the first place, the extensive proliferation of contemporary art biennials throughout the world, and especially in the global South, with more than 250 exhibitions, shows that biennials are replacing museums of modern art as spaces for displaying the latest developments and creations of contemporary art. Second, since the 1990s, there has been an increased awareness that contemporary art is not exclusive to the Western hemisphere but is created in all parts of the world. Third, a variety of art institutions around the world have approaches towards regional art discourses and their history. Fourth, there are curators and art professionals from diverse regions of the world. Finally, art market structures are constantly transformed, as art fairs are spreading all over the world, major auction houses and galleries are opening branches in economically rising regions, and lastly, many collectors today are art buyers from India, Russia, China or the Arab Emirates. Those changes require a reflection on the modes of displaying artworks, which are created in different historical and regional context. There is a demand for researches concerning the transformations in the contemporary art field (van der Grijp/Fillitz 2018: 1f). According to the anthropologist Thomas Fillitz, through globalisation, a plurality of interconnected worlds has become constitutive for contemporary global art. Art is an element of processes of globalisation and produces and contests cultural differences and identities (Fillitz 2015: 301).

The sociologist Howard S. Becker defines art worlds as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organised via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things,

produce(s) the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (Becker 1984: x). George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (1995) critical anthropology of art builds upon Becker's art worlds. The authors of "The Traffic in Culture" are not concerned with defining art but rather with understanding how practices and discourses around artwork produce difference, identity and cultural value (Marcus/Myers 1995: 10). Anthropologists Marcus and Myers lead us back to the general view of the scholars discussed in this chapter: The notion of contemporary art is not about limiting definitions, but more about the social, cultural and global processes constituting global art worlds. In this context, new theories of contemporary art and art worlds came up, such as the concept of global art.

3.2. World Art and Global Art

With the increasing prominence of art from all over the world and with the diversity of art practices in Europe and America, art history and theory required new reflections on art. In the 1990s two new frameworks were introduced – *world art* and *global art*, which posed major shifts in art history and theory (Fillitz 2015: 299).

In the early 1990s John Onians, Professor Emeritus of World Art at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, defines world art studies, as "treating all art equally and applying all the approaches of the separate disciplines to the whole field." (Onians 2003: 259). He emphasises that it is necessary not to consider Europe as a centre of art history, but rather as another "dark continent" on which the creation and use of art is - and always has been - just as "odd and problematic as it is thought about other regions." (ibid.: 259). The concept world art is being criticised, as having strong connotations from the colonial past. Moreover, world art is only describing non-Western art and considers the concept of contemporary art from a Eurocentric, North American-centric perspective. Within this context, the very category of "contemporary art" seems to be generally introduced in the 1980s and was later described more particularly as postmodern art between the 1980s and 2000s. Since then, the notion of contemporary art has spread out on a global scale and expanded to a universal dimension, as a result of globalisation processes. The framework of global art counters both the universalising notion of contemporary art and the European-North American centrism (Fillitz, van der Grijp 2018: 9).

Whereas world art is based on modernism's universalism, global art differs profoundly from world art, as global art is equal to contemporary art. Global art does not strive to represent a new context, but rather a deconstruction of context through a critical perspective on art concepts defined in terms of inclusion and exclusion (Belting 2009: 39f). Art historian Hans Belting

argues, global art “often blurs any kind of border between mainstream art, on the one side, and popular on the other, and thus abolishes the old dualism between Western art and ethnographic practice by using indigenous traditions as a reference” (ibid.: 40). The concept of global art refers to the local and global changes that we can observe nowadays, and calls for new approaches to art. Thus, anthropologist Thomas Fillitz emphasises that the anthropological perspective is fundamental to the concept of global art. The global art debate is not only influenced by anthropological theories¹, but equally by the need to examine contemporary art locally – both within its regional and global contexts, through the methods of ethnographic field research. However, anthropological scholars remained largely absent in the debate around global art (Fillitz 2015: 300).

Hans Belting and his colleague Anna Buddensieg, both researchers of the *Global Art and the Museum* project (GAM) at the *Centre for Art and Media* (ZKM, Karlsruhe) argue, “Today, art production with its cultural diversity addresses the curator as an ethnographer. At the same time the ethnographer acts as an art critic.” (Belting/Buddensieg 2013: 30). As more and more ethnographers curate contemporary art and art curators also study art within a cultural context, art curators and ethnographers seem to switch their roles. Modern art is Eurocentric, hegemonic, excluded ethnic artefacts and was spread by colonialism. With the rise of contemporary art, the counter movement to modern art, the dualism of art history and ethnology disperses. Contemporaneity postulates to cross the divisions of history, which divided the world for a long time. When artists belonging to previously rejected cultures enter the stage, inclusion and visibility is emphasised. Contemporary art in contrast to modern art doesn’t hinge on professionalism and originality through style and form. Rather than self-expression, it is about self-performing and therefore the artist needs a public stage. Global art removed cultural distance between centre and periphery through new media and democratised art through film and TV, while video installations shape immersive spaces which democratise art (Belting 2009: 55ff).

According to Peter Weibel, who is also part of the GAM project, speaking about art as contemporary art is itself an effect of global transformations (Weibel 2013: 25). Today’s art and its expansion all over the globe no longer claims the avant-garde position of modern art (Belting/Buddensieg 2013: 28). Global art “presents itself as contemporary, in a chronological, symbolical, and even ideological sense. Thus, twenty-first century art testifies to worldwide

¹ E.g. Marc Augé’s „An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds“ (1999) and Arjun Appadurai’s concept of 5 scapes of global cultural flows, formulated in his essay „Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy“ (1990)

contemporaneity without limits of the kind imposed by the western privilege of history.” (ibid.: 28). The emerging diversity of multiple art worlds is among other things a result of the fact that artistic production is more and more becoming cultural production. That is in places, where contemporary art is still a new experience and local traditions are needed as driving force behind art production. A new kind of world map of art, “in which the label of identity serves as distinction.” (ibid.: 28 f).

While Western hegemony is countered by global art and multiple identities creating art, the local and the regional is revaluated, which can be also found in the biennial format (Weibel 2013: 27). The spread of biennials all over the world has changed the world map of contemporary art forever (Belting/Buddensieg 2013: 28). In this sense, the following will take a closer look at practices and structures of the biennial institution through which global art is produced, distributed and circulated.

4. Biennials – A Global Exhibition Form

[Biennials] had created and enabled a world-picture of art that was globally networked without necessarily being a mere handmaiden to globalization (...) and which entwined with the motifs of laboratory-like experimentation and global peripheralism. Green/Gardener 2016

The curator and critic, Rafal Niemojewski defines the *biennial* as “large-scale international survey show of contemporary art that recurs at regular intervals but not necessarily biannually.” (Niemojewski 2010: 90). Further, biennales can be described as mega-events showing contemporary art in mostly temporary spaces whose scale and capability for resistance draws attention to a widespread audience (Joy/Belk 2019: 16). The growing spread of the biennial across the world is called in the biennial discourse *proliferation of the biennial* and is conceptualised in different ways. Caroline A. Jones (2010) is speaking of the “biennial culture”, which describes the contemporary, which describes the contemporary biennial trend of defining art as experience and the contemporary notion of “experience marketing”. The anthropologist Thomas Fillitz (2015) is distinguishing between two main conceptualisations of the notion of art biennials. Some scholars regard biennials as “core format of a new art worlds-order” with the proliferation of the format across the world since the mid-1980s onwards. On the other hand, art biennials are looked at “as another system of the dominant European/North American art world, as another hegemony that is defined as ‘biennialisation.’” (URL 6). Academics and critics Charles Green, Anthony Gardener, Paul O’Neill, Oliver Marchart and others, call this cultural phenomenon “biennialisation” (Green/Gardener 2016: 4). When talking about the widespread biennial phenomenon, Hans Belting (2009) is referring to the concept of global art, which is seen in connection with the emergence of biennials and equals the conception of contemporary art. Based on Hans Belting’s conceptualisation, which challenges the Eurocentric view, I approach the phenomenon in the context of the global art concept, which was discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

There has been a lack of scholarly and theoretical examinations of the biennale phenomenon, whereby other aspects of global processes and culture productions have long been part of in-depth research in the social sciences (Green/Gardener 2016: 4f). Nevertheless, the multiplicity of biennials, curatorial themes and forms of infrastructure has led to some analysis. In their book “Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that created Contemporary Art” (2016) the contemporary art historians Charles Green and Anthony Gardener examine the influences of biennials on global contemporary art since the 1950s. Green and Gardener argue, biennials are one of the most striking phenomena in the contemporary global culture and have

come to define contemporary art since the early 1990s (ibid.: 3). According to Green and Gardener, they have become “one of the most popular – perhaps even dominant – formats for presenting and promoting culture today.” (ibid.: 4). There are publications giving a general introduction, such as Charlotte Bydler’s “The Global Art World Inc.” (2004) and Bruce Altshuler’s “Biennials and Beyond” (2013). The art historian Bydler is analysing the effects of globalisation on the contemporary art world system and Altshuler, professor of museum studies, is examining the most significant contemporary art exhibitions in the context of art history. On the other hand, there are publications focussing on the effects of “biennialisation” in the context of particular exhibitions, such as Rachel Weiss’s edited collection of essays “Making Art Global: The Third Bienal de la Habana 1989” (2011). One of the first academic works of the subject is John Clark’s comprehensive research on contemporary Asian art and history of Asian biennials – “Modern Asian Art” (1998).

Several international and research-oriented conferences on biennales have reinforced scholarly examinations, such as “The Bergen Biennial Conference (2009)” organised by Bergen Kunsthall in Norway which resulted in the ground-breaking anthology about biennials “The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions on Contemporary Art” (2010). An overall and comprehensive global history on the rise of biennials was published by Green and Gardener, stated above. Hans Belting, Anna Buddensieg and Peter Weibel organised an extensive research project “GAM – Global Art and the Museum” initiated in 2006 at the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe and published several anthologies (2009, 2011, 2013, 2015) discussing new art worlds in the context of globalisation, describing the concept of *global art* and contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of the biennial format. In August 2020, Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Thomas Fillitz will publish their anthology “The Biennale of Dakar and the Making of Contemporary African Art” (2020), investigating the Dak’Art Biennale and contributing to the current discourse about biennales, the place of art in the world and anthropology of art. Anthropologist and art theorist Panos Kompatsiaris published “The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art” (2017) examining the recent phenomena of political interventions at the sites of “new biennials”. Using his two ethnographic case studies of the 3rd Athens Biennale (2011) and the 7th Berlin Biennale (2012), he discusses the entanglements of art and politics within recent biennials and their socio-political relevance for contemporary societies (Kompatsiaris 2017: 2).

Central to this chapter is to show the discourses around biennials, as they are one of the most discussed subjects among art professionals. The major source for the discussion of the

proliferation of the biennial format is the Biennial Reader of the 2009 Bergen Biennial Conference, one of the largest international conferences on biennials ever organised. The aim of the conference was to rethink the traditional biennial format, through the response to local particularities and the construction of spaces and platforms for discourse in order to imagine a new biennial and to expand the existing biennial knowledge. The Bergen Biennial Conference also represented the discursive turn of biennials and discussed the historical, socioeconomic and geopolitical contexts, which provoked the rise of those large-scale exhibition (Alloway et al. 2009: 6f).

As such, taking the biennial, as a central subject of study generates a prism through which to look at the broader art world (if not the world as whole), because what we can learn from biennials informs us about all the things that biennials depend upon, react to, and ineluctably impact: art, artists, audiences, curating, and art institutions, but also cultural policy, the market, the public sphere, specific locales, tourism, and city branding. (Filipovic, van Hal, Østvebø 2010: 24)

The editors of the Biennial Reader emphasise the role of biennials as field of study not only providing information about the art world and conceptions of art, but also enlightening social, political and cultural issues shaping the biennial. They somewhat provocatively call for a “biennialology” and see a need to treat the contemporary biennial phenomenon as serious field of study (ibid.: 16). According to the scholars in the field of biennial research, the biennial is by its very nature a global phenomenon, which has driven the spread of art from all regions of the world. Therefore, it is argued that the careful study of biennials is necessary to write a contemporary art history and will perhaps also call for the writing of an appropriate global art history (ibid.: 22).

4.1. Genesis of Contemporary Art Biennials

The oldest running periodical art exhibition, the Venice Biennale, is operating since 1895 and introduced the very word *biennale* to the global art world. Over the last 100 years the biennial format, also referred to as Biennial or Triennial, has been adopted by a variety of periodical art exhibitions around the world (Kompatsiaris 2014: 77). The biennial has become a recognisable and unifying brand and established itself into the landscapes of the global art world and its audience as an internationalised and periodical format of art display that brings together the latest spectrum of contemporary art (Kompatsiaris 2017: 22). According to the anthropologist and art theorist Panos Kompatsiaris, the application of the name biennial “triggers an imaginary constellation of already established values related to cosmopolitanism, cutting-edge art or modernisation, which are in turn inserted within the value regimes of various local contexts.”

(ibid.). The four main biennials of the twentieth's century – those of Venice and São Paulo, the Canergie International in Pittsburgh and Documenta in Kassel – are the most prominent developments of the Venetian biennial model. The more ground-breaking event concerning the proliferation of biennials and contemporary art was the “Havanna Biennale”, taking place for the first time in 1984 (Niemojewski 2010: 95).

“La Bienal de Habana” was the first recurring large-scale exhibition established outside the longstanding centres of the contemporary art world. For the first time the focus was strictly on artists from the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa displayed in line with formal criteria rather than nationality. The Havana Biennale also extended the traditional model of one key exhibition through a combination of discussions, shows, performances and workshops led by artists. The innovative nature of the Havana Biennale is also characterised by a new rhetoric that was centred on discussions surrounding globalisation and postcolonialism instead of relying on the “Three Worlds” model. The focus was on discourse around the global versus the local and the dichotomy of centre and periphery. From the outset the exhibition's framework was created to make claims for a variety of recent issues and was organised along formal criteria rather than national origin. Migration, displacement, nomadism and marginalisation, diasporic identities and cultural hybridisation, ecological matters and the periphery of the postmodern world – all those questions are still a matter of today's biennials. The curatorship gave great attention to works addressing cultural, religious and ethnic particularism. Difference and multivocality of discourse were highlighted instead of communicating a single universalising curatorial statement imposed on the exhibition. Exhibiting artist were considered as a diverse group of individuals, rather than representatives of a single country or culture. For over a century the Venice Biennale has neglected non-European/North American art, whereas Havana's biennial was the first displaying recent work and privileging art production outside the European and North American art centres. Most of the biennials proliferating across the globe have not followed the Venetian model, rather they developed out of the Havana biennial's rhetoric (Niemojewski 2010: 95ff).

While the Venice Biennale is grounded on the concept of national pavilions with national (self-) representation and the aim to show world art, newly emerging biennials rather make claims for a cultural, regional particularism, but also with a focus on global elements (Sheikh 2009: 71).

While many of the new biennials may, in some respect, be read as continual expressions of modernity (notably through their association with the accumulation of symbolic capital), it was the Havana Biennial

that established the contemporary biennial as platform for the critique of this same modernity (...) and explores the plurality of modernism. (Niemojewski 2010: 100)

Rafal Niemojewski, scholar of contemporary art and director of the Biennial Foundation², points out the significance of the Havana Biennial in terms of its critical perspective on the art world and contemporary art history. The Havana model's idea of the critical platform continues to be a central element of newly emerging biennials and shows its potential for resistance and alternative perspectives. Within the discourse amongst academics and biennial practitioners those new biennials are also referred to as *biennials of the South* or *biennials of resistance* (Fillitz 2016; Kompatsiaris 2014; Hoskote 2010; Gardener and Green 2013). The potentials and ambivalences of those new biennial format are evaluated in the next sections. The genesis of biennials has shown how the biennial format developed from national pavilions at Venice to platforms of discussions about globalisation and postcolonialism at Havana and the emergence of various biennial exhibitions across the globe. To understand the proliferation of contemporary art biennials and its role in defining contemporary art, it is important to examine, how biennials pose alternative and critical perspectives on contemporary art production and circulation, but also how biennials are embedded in global processes and capital flows.

4.2. Potentials and Challenges of the Biennial Format

According to art critic and biennial curator Hlavajova, the success and wide spread of the biennial format can be found in its potential to create new social spaces within the art world, where new meanings and imaginaries can come into existence. In comparison to other art institutions the scale of the biennial audience is shaped by an overlap of cosmopolitan, travelling and local communities (Hlavajova 2010: 304). As Paul O'Neill describes it - within biennials "the 'local' and the 'global' are in constant dialogue." (O'Neill 2010: 244).

Compared to galleries or museums, the biennial can be in general more experimental, it can change locations between editions and take up various forms of display. Therefore, the biennial and its distinct formal structure create new discourses around the display, production and generation of knowledge within the contemporary art fields. As the contemporary art biennial largely comprises heterogeneous projects, differing in terms of visibility, funding, aims, and political, economic and cultural contexts, it cannot be defined as a homogenous phenomenon.

² The Biennial Foundation was established in 2009 as independent think-tank, fostering the research and dialogue among contemporary art foundations around the world (URL 7; Biennial Foundation 2015)

Still there are some common characteristics of those kind of large-scale events (Kompatsiaris 2014: 77ff).

First, unlike institutional group exhibitions, biennales often need to meet local as well as global expectations. Art historian Sabine Vogel argues, biennials should create bridges between the local particularities and global perspectives. Therefore, they reflect the local and create a global platform at the same time (Vogel 2010: 9). In this context, the art theorist Thierry de Duve is speaking of “the glocalisation of the art world via the proliferation of art biennials” (de Duve 2007: 684). Biennials give cities and regions away from art centres the possibility to put themselves on the global art map and to participate in the contemporary art industry. At the same time, they make it possible to a wider audience to have access to the latest art (Green/Gardener 2016: 6). According to the art critics and scholars Ferguson and Hoegsberg, the increased emergence of biennials signals “a far-reaching instrumentalization of contemporary art, in particular as a tool for dealing with issues such as education, cultural diversity and integration, cultural tourism, urban and social regeneration, and identity politics.” (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 362). As recognisable brand, the biennial has the potential to market cities, promises economic prosperity, social prestige and international relevance. From the perspective of a global intellectual art audience, biennial formats might seem a repetition of a pantheon of limited artists and intellectual curatorial frameworks, while for local audiences and artists biennials may be a crucial factor for access and exposure to the international and contemporary art world (ibid.: 367). In this sense Ferguson and Hoegsberg argue, “the relation between knowledge for the public and knowledge for the cognoscenti is as tense as the fission between local and global representations, or between local relevance and international visibility.” (ibid.). While studying biennials, one must consider local particularities and globally universalised aspects shaping the biennial format.

A second common attribute of biennials is the financing through public or private sources, usually not depending on art investors, whereas in contrast the *art fair* reflects a more commercial format. Thus, compared to the art fair the contemporary biennial draws more the attention to the public and has a greater potential to show artworks not exclusively with the aim to sell, such as site-specific art, large-scale installations, video installations or performances. Moreover, in contrast to the art fair the biennial is generally based on a concept formulated by the curator(s). The curator functions primarily as mediator rather than a mere authorial figure (Kompatsiaris 2014: 78). Still, according to art historian a Caroline A. Jones one should not neglect that the contemporary biennial exhibitions are connected to the international exhibitions

of nineteenth century, which have their roots in national trade fairs of the late eighteenth century (Jones 2010: 68). The biennial exhibitions also play a role in fostering national, regional and global economies, of which art production and artists are part (ibid.: 79). In her book *“Global Work of Art”* (2017) Jones examines in the face of global biennials and artists’ engagement with large-scale exhibitions, the influence of world fairs of the nineteenth century. Jones argues that with the appropriation of the world fairs by the biennial form in the twentieth century the aspect of cultural and international marketing persisted. Contemporary biennials have built a strong connection “between tourism and art, fostering the seductive marketing of experience that fuels contemporary biennial culture today.” (ibid.: 82). Biennials are facilitated by supranational funds (EU, Baltic, UNESCO), as well as national authorities (British Council, Japan Foundation, Australian Council, French Ministry of Culture). Such donor’s see the great value of the biennial’s discursive scope. Equally, corporate partners (BMW, Tata Group, Nivea, Illy) provide sources of funding in exchange for logos in the catalogue or a place at the opening event and a link to cultural engagement. Jones points out that current biennials are still linked to same ambitions as former international exhibitions. There are among other things, strong links to tourism, effects on urban infrastructure, impact on international art-world circulations, recovery from formerly restrictive regimes through cosmopolitanism, the opening to multinational capital investment and new geopolitical aspirations as well as local political objectives (ibid.: 68f).

In addition to political endeavours, the focus is above all on the production of knowledge, which is no longer based on the assumption of isolated moveable art objects, but on the increasingly notion of “art as experience” (Jones 2010: 69). The increasing focus of the biennial on the perception of art as a tangible experience is connected to a rising dominance of installation and a “site-specific localism” (ibid.: 70). Those exhibition models are related to Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, which considers art as “an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, action and objects.” (Bourriaud 2002: 107). Curator, Daniel Birnbaum of the fifty-third Venice Biennial “Making Worlds” reflects this way of thinking in his opening statement: “A work of art is more than an object, more than a commodity. It (...) must be seen in a way of ‘making a world’.” (Birnbaum 2009: 7). Guided by the approach of experience, the alternative display and knowledge production of the biennial format should replace the traditional models established by museums. But neither the biennial nor the museum is a self-contained entity, both underlie processes of interaction and transformation. The biennial is guided by a methodology, consisting of an interdisciplinary approach and dealing with various social concerns (Papastergiadis/Martin 2011: 37). Placing

artworks in various local and social contexts through the principle of site-specificity, the biennial format counteracts the *white cube*, which describes a North American and European universality and modernity. According to the curator and art historian Elena Filipovic, white cubes, which are mainly present in museums and galleries, display artworks without contexts of daily life, create neutral, universal and rational spaces and place the viewer in a pure and neutral realm outside the everyday world. For the biennial format it makes less sense to create such plain spaces, as the institutional focus of biennials lies in historic, cultural and geographic particularities. The increasing expansion of the biennial goes together with the curatorial ambitions of producing new knowledge and creating intellectual debate rather than mere representation of artworks (Filipovic 2010: 323ff).

Since 1972, it was through biennials, triennials, and documenta that contemporary art migrated from its often hermetic, often politically reconstructive, avant-garde and experimental origins into the realm of the spectacular, garnering global public attention to contemporary art. And as we are seeing now, in the early twenty-first century, biennials may also be leading the reconsideration and reconstruction of art's histories towards properly global narratives. (Green/Gardener 2016: 277)

Green and Gardener highlight that biennials of the twenty-first century moved beyond the exhibition model of Venice Biennale, developing new forms of display and experimental approaches as well as a “critical self-reflexive curatorship” of contemporary art. Curators of biennials seem to construct – more than art historians – new narratives towards a global art history and create exhibitions of communal and social environment. With its focus on the social realm, biennials foster new modes on exhibition-making (ibid.: 276f).

Hoskote argues that the biennial is a powerful vehicle for activating new audiences and searching new interlocutors and have the potential to transform local consciousness. In this sense, Hoskote wonders if the biennial can be “an inclusive non-alienating spectacle” (Hoskote 2010: 321). Niemojewski similarly states that contemporary biennials can activate audiences and a platform necessary for discussing and questioning social, economic and cultural aspects of globalisation (Niemojewski 2010: 101). In this sense, Filipovic highlights “models of resistance”, which biennials may provide through “the development of more engaged and dialectical relationships between artworks and their presentation frames” as well as by the way of “projects and viewers that are more aware of the ideological entanglements of the structures and strategies, they experience every day.” (Filipovic 2010: 343).

On the one hand biennials claim attempts to create new worlds and modes of resistance for the local and global audiences by fostering critique, debate and discussion of social, economic and

cultural aspects of globalisation. On the other hand, they operate as brand promising economic prosperity, increasing tourism and international relevance for the region. Kompatsiaris points out this ambiguity of biennials and the necessity to investigate what kind of worlds the biennial creates and for whom (Kompatsiaris 2014: 77). In order to come closer to an understanding of these complexities, the new typologies of exhibition making must be examined more closely. As already mentioned, currently biennials are developing towards the *discursive exhibition* promising a platform for discussions, a more inclusive approach and the self-determination of the audience. The following discusses discursive exhibition practices, in which ways they promote a critical discourse and how far they engage a more inclusive audience.

4.3. The Discursive Exhibition: From Spectacle to Local Specifics

Due to the enormous proliferation of the biennial model over the globe, the curatorial relevance of the biennial lost its scope and had to be revaluated among art scholars, curators and biennial professionals.

For some sceptics the word biennial has come to signify nothing more than an overblown symptom of spectacular event culture, the result of some of the most specious transformations of the world in the age of late capitalism – in short, a Western typology whose proliferation has infiltrated even the most far-reaching parts of the world, where such events are littler more than entertaining or commercially driven showcases designed to feed an ever-expanding tourist industry (in other words, something not far removed from Disneyland). (Filipovic, van Hal, Østvebø 2010: 13)

As the organisers of the Bergen Biennial conference highlight, the “biennial” has become among some critics a synonym for an entertaining spectacle and a product of North American and European capitalism. The idea of global exchange, of creating alternatives to the Western canon and producing knowledge outside the museum has not been sufficiently realised. The biennial structure was confronted with a set of problems: repetitive intellectual curatorial patterns; a limited pantheon of artist and over-exposed art, whose production and circulation is strictly hierarchically; the false application of site-specificity as a practice, which initial focus on local contexts was transferred to a mere adaption of aesthetics of style and false social commitment; as well as the imitation of the museums or galleries in form of an architectural style of the modernist *white cube*. Instead of only scratching the surface of local issues, the site-specific project relies on the engagement with the audience and dialogue, which demands for a more inclusive and discursive curatorial frameworks (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 362ff).

The various problems of the biennial model, examined by Ferguson and Hoegsberg, led to a revaluation and development of new perspectives towards the biennial. The intellectual

discourse around biennials turned into a new direction of discursivity. In the context of discursivity, the biennial is no longer considered as spectacle, rather the biennial can be seen within another perspective of exhibition-making – the discursive exhibition:

(...) the show as a testing ground for artistic innovations, a laboratory in which to experiment with new ways of activating the relationship between viewers and artworks, between artworks and their site, and between artworks and their architecture of display. For the biennial is neither exclusively nor even primarily a space of spectacular display, but rather a discursive environment: a theatre that allows for the staging of arguments, speculations, and investigations concerning the nature of our shared, diversely veined, and demanding contemporary condition. (Hoskote 2010: 308)

In this context, Hoskote speaks of the biennial as the “studios of studios” – as joint partner in the collaborative process of community production and the loop as main characteristic of the experience of art (Hoskote 2010: 316). The current evolvement of the *discursive exhibition* is also related to the *discursive turn* in exhibition practice. The new focus on discursivity within the biennial practice signals a movement from art to audience to counter the loss of curatorial relevance of biennials (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 368). The discursivity of the biennial can be also seen as an aspect of what the Austrian post-conceptual artist, curator and new media theoretician Peter Weibel calls the *performative turn*. It engenders the self-determination of the audience and views art as democratic practice, where everyone can participate (Weibel 2013: 24ff).

According to Kompatsiaris the discursive exhibition model resonates with the Foucauldian notion of “discourse” and with the cultural theory of post-structuralism in general, as there is no distinction between art practice and theory. Both are compiled under the umbrella of “discourse” (Kompatsiaris 2017: 40). Compared to the notion of ideology, Foucault preferred the term discourse “to describe the embodied character of statements, ideas and beliefs that circulate around public space and their capacity to shape modes of being.” (ibid.: 41). In “History of Sexuality Volume 1” Michel Foucault states “We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1978: 101). Following Foucault’s definition, Kompatsiaris argues that discursive exhibitions could create a culture of discourse in which diverse statements and ideas participate. In contrast to the notion of ideology, discourses can be both dominant and opposing. The term “discourse” refers to a series of statements, proposals and ideas that appear in science, politics, popular culture or art, which implicitly or tacitly suggest ways of thinking and speaking about a topic and thus shape social practices, dispositions and tendencies

(Kompatsiaris 2017: 41). Within the framework of discursivity, contemporary art biennials increasingly focus on a model of exhibition making that goes beyond the visual, which Kompatsiaris describes as an “extra visual” dialogue with the general public and in the public space (Kompatsiaris 2014: 76).

4.3.1. Platforms for Intra-regional and Global Dialogue

Discursive exhibitions involve discussion platforms, symposia, research and educational program in order to question the curatorial format from within and to lay a focus on pedagogy and knowledge production. In the last twenty years, the focus of the exhibition practice shifted from the mere and exclusive display of specific objects (in various art institutions) to the sensory experience and engagement of the audience through listening, reading, studying and discussion. Rather than merely looking, the visitors become participants of biennials which became sites for discursive exhibiting. A central aspect of the discursive turn is the emergence of curatorial strategies promoting long-term projects, which are also referred to as “durational” projects. Those curatorial projects are more process oriented, developing over several months or years (Ferguson/Hoegsberg: 2010: 361).

As already mentioned above the curator’s role at a biennial is primarily the one of mediators (Kompatsiaris 2014: 78). Since the 90s there is also a shift in the curator’s role from a more conceptual and passive to a more creative and active position. Curating is considered as possibility of discussion, critique and debate extending the mere display by incorporating conversational, discursive, socio- and geopolitical discussions incorporated in the exhibition format (O’Neill 2010: 243). In “The Field of Cultural Production” (1993) Pierre Bourdieu is describing the curator’s role in adding meaning and value to art making and the artists (Bourdieu 1993: 261). The importance of the curatorial position becomes even more visible as contemporary art exhibitions are a major vehicle for the circulation and reception of art as well as a main actor in criticism and debate about contemporary art. Such as the exhibition, the curator him-/herself can be described as principle medium “through which contemporary art is now mediated, experienced and historicized.” (O’Neill 2010: 243).

In their essay “Art biennials and cities as platforms for global dialogue” (2011) Nikos Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin examine the possibility of biennials to create various sites which critically deal with “global processes of capital flow and cultural exchange” (Papastergiadis/Martin 2011: 37). Martin and Papastergiadis point out that the discursive approach of the emergent biennial models is based on the term *platform* which has encouraged

a revaluation of forms of engagement between art and the audience as well as the city or region in which the biennial is located. The transformation towards a discursive curatorial strategy is grounded in the evolvement of artists using the whole city as space for their artworks in order to distance the biennale from the generic model of event culture and spectacle (ibid: 37f). Hans Belting also argues that recently artists' practice is not so much about self-expression but rather about self-performance which needs a public stage, a platform (Belting 2009: 55). The development of the discursive exhibition raises the question whether the biennial is a more inclusive event, instead of being a mere spectacle. New forms of engagement with art through the platform, site-specificity and experience should counteract the spectacle and the loss of relevance of the biennial.

According to Ferguson and Hoegsberg the discursivity is a response to "the power brokering of the West; peripatetic international curators and artists intervening insensitively in a local situation; the lack of impact on communities and the lack of structures for cultural sustainability after a biennial's occurrence." (Ferguson Hoegsberg 2010: 364). The discursive exhibition is a shift to a serious interest in regional and local contexts. The biennial format becomes an adequate alternative to give local practices a platform for recognition and to share the local knowledge. Such a space for local art practices and knowledge, was missing in the artistic community – before the discursive format. The discursive biennial marks a profound change in knowledge production around art. What was for a long time the realm of the museums is now taken over by the biennial – as Ferguson and Hoegsberg also stress: "The discursive biennial signals a migration of the prerogative of knowledge production through art from the museum and the academy to the biennial." (ibid.: 366). Biennials are considered as far-reaching means of new knowledge production. Therefore, the focus shifts on projects with local relevance responding to socio-political issues existing at the local level. In long-term residency programs up to two years artists from inside and outside engage with local issues and exchange their experience. These programs, established by most of the new biennials, foster an ongoing dialogues, prolonged engagements and lead to a new sustainability of local art spaces. The display itself moves in the background, whereas the dialogue becomes the most important feature of the biennial format (ibid.: 369f).

Ferguson and Hoegsberg call this shift away from the display to dialogue, "cultural sustainability.". More and more curators are willing to show less prestigious artists, evoking engaged audiences and an exchange of local and international artists, instead of creating a spectacular exhibition. Also, the opening events are less exclusive involving local audiences.

The discursive exhibition is more considered as processual, evolving and inclusive program and places “greater emphasis on relationships with artists, the process of artistic production, and the production of new audiences” (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 369). Cultural sustainability entails the responsibility of producing exhibitions as meaningful engagements within a specific local context in order to positively influence the social and cultural infrastructure and the various communities (ibid.: 373).

A central issue of biennial formats is the question of centrality and regionality – the combination of regional particularities and local flair with international representation. There is the tension of meeting local as well as global expectations.

At the centre of the debate is the question of whether ‘art’, however it is defined, can be an instrument of universal exchange and values in opposition to the degree to which it is always local in some way. The desire to be both global and local is inherent to a large degree in the promise and promotion of each biennial. (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 372)

The shift to the discursive format can be understood as a path of critical examination of the processes and value systems of the art world and its role in producing knowledge and meaning for contemporary art. To that end, the discursive exhibition also poses a model of a performative turn in the biennial form (ibid.: 373).

The biennial format moved from spectacular exhibitions and the display of prestigious artists to more inclusive events and an emphasis on sustained dialogue and production of new knowledge and new audiences. New knowledge production within biennial’s programs and the reflection on the formats depends very much on the distributions of international publications by the biennials in order to circulate their ideas. This also signals an important shift to discursivity (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 369). In 2016, four years after the first edition of Kochi-Muziris Biennale academics Robert E. D’Souza and Sunil Manghani published the anthology “India’s Biennale Effect: A politics of contemporary art”, thus bringing the Kochi-Muziris Biennale into the discourse on biennials.

5. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale

In her essay “Kochi-Muziris: Biennale as South Asian Form” (2016), curator Natasha Ginwala describes the KMB “as a public forum that corresponds with an aesthetic language grounded in the local realm and its political imagination, while also tuning into key developments within the international sphere of contemporary cultural practice.” (Ginwala 2016: 14). According to Ginwala, there has been an increased circulation of discursive platforms and intra-regional exhibitions in South Asia, accompanied by the growing international presence of South Asian artists curators at cultural festivals, museums, and biennales. At the same time, the biennial model itself has been established at different sites across South Asia, as a newly designed format such as the Kathmandu Triennale in Nepal, the Karachi and Lahore Biennial in Pakistan, the Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka, the Dhaka Art Summit in Bangladesh and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India. Those newly shaped and still developing biennials carry the promise of making a sustainable contribution to the cultural ecology of these regions. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale Foundation underlines the significant presence of South Asian artists to avoid an Indian-centric approach within the discourse on South Asian contemporary art and exhibition-making (ibid: 14f).

According to art and cultural theorists D’ Souza and Manghani, India’s Kochi-Muziris Biennale has been presented as one of the most important newly released biennials, parallel to Sharjah, Shanghai, and Dakar (D’Souza/Manghani 2016: 3). In their publication “India’s Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art” (2016) D’Souza and Manghani provide a comprehensive analysis of the so-called “biennale effect” – “a layered contestation of place, economic, art and politics” in the context of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale contributing to the international discourse around the biennale phenomenon (ibid.: 4). As already mentioned, scholarly publications about new biennials are an essential aspect of the discursivity and knowledge production around the biennial phenomenon and the understanding of its broader social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Such publications are part of the discursive biennial and should foster critical thinking of the biennial format.

D’Souza explains the significance of political processes, forming the context of the emergence of the Indian biennial. The increasing internationalisation of Indian art because of globalisation and the regional inequalities in response to this internationalisation, as well as the development of art centres of contemporary art in key metropolitan cities, are significant factors paving the way for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (D’Souza 2016: 30). Since the first event of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, it is also referred to as “People’s Biennale” concerning the specific political

context of social action in the communist state of Kerala. Equally, it also reflects the Biennale's artist-led curatorial approach and the engagement of local, national, and international artists as well as the communities of Kochi (D'Souza/Manghani 2016: 3). To understand the specificity of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, I first locate the art event within India's contemporary art scene and recent history of political modernisation and internationalism, to explore in a second step the development of the "People's Biennale" in the state of Kerala.

5.1. India's Contemporary Scene

Due to his observations at the "Global Art and Museum" Conference in India, in 2008, Hans Belting argues that the colonial past is still an issue in today's art history. Belting notes, "Counter-narratives increasingly replace narratives of Western modernism with different concepts such as the return to national narratives of Indian art." (Belting 2009: 47). He also emphasises "that colonial history still unduly dominates the cultural topics in India and guides the attention to long time experiences with foreign art, while native traditions and aesthetics have little space in today's art history" (ibid.: 48). Significant counter-narratives are shaped by the art historian Partha Mitter. He focusses on the reception of Indian art in the West, on Indian modernity, art and identity, and, more recently, on global modernism. With his book "Indian Art" (2001), Mitter reassesses Indian art through an encompassing cultural history that locates art production and patronage in its cultural and social contexts. He argues that Indian art history must be written in line with its unique qualities and not with the belief in universal art history. Mitter notes in his writings:

The interesting question is not what Indian art shares with western art, but how it differs from it. (...) Unlike the narrow western interpretation of fine art, the distinction between fine and decorative arts was not pronounced in India, which evolved, for example, a great tradition of decorated utensils. Any discussion of Indian art must encompass a wide range of different media: architecture, sculpture, illustrated manuscripts, painting, miniatures, textiles, and latterly photography and installation work. It is inappropriate to attempt a purely stylistic analysis that uses categories and influences derived from the West as these do not take into account the very particular cultural and political developments of the subcontinent. Partha Mitter 2001: 1

In his Indian art history, Mitter also includes groups hidden from history – tribal art, women's art, and the arts of everyday use produced by artisans. Gond art, for instance, is known for wall paintings shared by Hindu village communities and is also represented at the 4th Kochi-Muziris Biennale (see Chapter 6.3.). Women's art with variant forms in different regions includes domestic art of floor painting, such as *rangoli* in Maharashtra as well as embroidery,

needlework, and textiles (ibid.: 157ff). Those art practices are to be found again as main themes at the Kochi-Muziris in 2018, which are evaluated in the empirical part (see Chapter 6.3.1.).

International modernism, which has entered India in the 1920s before Independence, increasingly gained speed after Independence in 1947. In the 1950s Indian artists were active part of the global strive for abstraction, as the 1950s to 1970s were dominated by non-figurative art, as global phenomenon. In the 1970s there was a turn to semi-abstract art, that continues today. On the eve of independence there was a widening of the social horizons of artists as artists such as M. F. Hussain and K. H. Ara (Bombay) sympathised with the burgeoning socialist movements. In 1945 the Bombay Progressive Artist Group in Calcutta was founded, which soon fell apart because two members went to Europe. Europe and particularly London became the training site for all leading Indian artists. Apart from a few exceptions, the Indian artists turned back to India with the European experience to shape the post-Independence artistic scene. There was a greater politicisation of art through postcolonial writings and the women's movement. During de-colonialization, Indian artists became more aware of their Indian identity as they confronted global modernity (Mitter 2001: 203ff). As Mitter notes, "the tensions generated by the conflicting demands of global modernity and national specificity became a major preoccupation of Third World artists." (ibid.: 206). Indian artists confronted global modernism as they were reasserting the cultural identity searching roots of their art practice in soil and common people and countering the avant-garde. Many of the artists of this generation strived for the obliteration of the distinction between high, elite, low, and subaltern art (ibid.: 203).

Since the 1970s, the most important development has been the emergence of the self-conscious group of women artists. The new group of women artists of the 1980s includes Nilima Sheikh, working with the medium of Indian miniatures, Madhavi Parekh, whose paintings drew upon village art such as floor designs of *Rangoli* and Mrinalini Mukherjee, a sculptor building totemic figures out of hemp, sometimes flowers symbolising female genitals (ibid.: 227ff). All three artists were exhibited at the 4th Kochi-Muziris Biennale, reflecting the curatorial focus on women artists (see Chapter 6).

According to Partha Mitter in 1990, South Asian artists began to challenge the privileged position of western avant-garde "in the art markets of the 'international art capitals', London and New York" (ibid.: 239). Renowned European and North American galleries and auction houses, such as Sotheby's and Christie's, open branches in Indian cities. Art galleries in South Asia are mushrooming, and they support more and more young artists. Recent sales in London

and New York have focused on Indian modern art. “But in all this”, as Mitter notes, “the most visible and critical presence has been that of woman artists and art critics, and perhaps in them lies the future development of Indian art.” (ibid.: 239). Greta Kapur, one of those new art critics, is challenging the concept of “modern art” in India since the debate around the “modern” came up in the 1970s (Mitter 2001, Manghani 2016). Kapur’s theoretical developments reassured Indian artists about their works. They felt more confident in countering the international market controlled by North American and European art critics, gallerists, and art dealers (Mitter 2001: 222). In her essay “Detours from the Contemporary” (2000) Greta Kapur puts emphasis on the tradition of resistance:

What we in India today call tradition was put in the fray by nineteenth-century nationalism. Since this version of tradition emerges in the decolonizing process as an oppositional category it has the power of resistance, as we know very well from Gandhi. It has the power to transform routinely transmitted materials from the past into volatile forms that merit the claim of contemporary, even radical, affect. (Kapur 2000: 267–268)

Based on Kapur’s statement, in the same way, Sunil Manghani argues that it is the idea of making a difference which led to the fact “that over a relatively short period of time, over a few decades, India as a site of contemporary art practice and critique is able to position itself with ever greater confidence” (Manghani 2016: 214). Manghani notes that the Kochi-Muziris Biennale also claims to be different and wants to step out from the former restrictions imposed by North America and Europe, history and economics to support the Indian contemporary art scene (ibid.: 214).

5.2. Exploring India’s Biennale Story

The art scholars and contributors of the publication “India’s Biennale Effect” Robert D’Souza and Dhritabrata Bhattacharjya Tato illustrate how the Kochi Muziris Biennale is reflecting the recent developments of India’s contemporary art scene and global identity. India’s biennial is filling the gap in the countries’ infrastructure for the exhibition and experimentation of contemporary art. On the other hand, the Kochi Biennale is tied to a long history of former cultural diplomacy and later politics of soft power after the economic liberalisation in the 1990s. D’Souza emphasises that the complex and layered historical situations were playing into the broader context of the Biennale, starting with the entry of India into the Venice Biennale in 2011 (D’Souza/Manghani 2016: 10).

The Delhi-based writer and cultural historian Dhritabrata Bhattacharjya Tato describes in her essay “Making of the Indian Artscape” (2016) the development of the Indian art scene. After

India's independence in 1947, the Indian government started to rebuild its image internationally, while shaping its culture and redefining its national identity through the state. The Indian government began to create Institutions such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Lalit Kala Akademi (Academy of Fine Arts), and the National Gallery for Modern Art to implement its cultural policy. What became successful in India's cultural policy are the various festivals or fairs spread across all parts of India. There are, amongst other, the "Jaipur Literary Festival", the "Kala Ghoda Arts Festival", "Indian Art Fair" in New Delhi (initially named the "Indian Art Summit") and the International Film Festivals of Goa, Thiruvananthapuram (capital of Kerala) and Kolkata. The rapid urbanisation of India and India's entry in the growing global economy created the condition for flourishing festivals in India's urban centres. Those festivals are still very much dependent on international reach and a need for high media value to establish sponsorships of multinational and large Indian cooperation. The active interest of the international Indian community was central to develop an Indian contemporary art scene with a global range. Since the 1990s, there was a steady rise in private galleries, and the growth of the "Indian Artscape" culminated in the first Indian Art Fair, formerly known as Indian Art Summit, in 2008. According to Tato central keys for the success of the establishment of art events, such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, are the scale and level of international participation. The flourishing of the Indian art scene was primarily due to the support of Indians who often not spend their lives in India and attracted foreign investments. In this context, Tato concludes, that media and international visibility are fundamental to create global relevance and to attract sponsors, be it in the context of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale or any other key event of the Indian festival culture. The financial support of the Kochi Biennale came from private as well as public sources. Kerala government, Kerala Tourism, Australia Council and the Goethe Institute are sponsoring the Biennale. Besides federal funds, the Biennale is supported by international art funds and corporate funding. BMW, which entered the Indian market after economic globalisation is one of the primary and long-term supporters of the Biennale along with Indian multinational conglomerates such as Tata, Indigo, Delhi Land & Finance (DLF) and Royal Enfield. Dhritabrata Bhattacharjya Tato points out that no art scape or any other cultural space can ever be autonomous or public, even if there is a strong demand for artistic freedom (Tato 2016: 63 ff.).

Artist and art scholar, Robert D'Souza explains the key events leading to what he calls the "biennale effect". The launch of the Biennale and the so-called biennale effect might reflect "India's contemporary global identity as part of a new agenda to forge a national identity not just economically but through 'soft power'." (D'Souza 2016: 45). In 1968, two decades after

Independence, India hosted its first Triennale. It was initiated as part of nation building, with the aim of the evolvement of national art infrastructure and the expression of the Nehru government's modernisation project and its internationalism. India's Triennale failed, as there was pressure from the governmental side to support traditional and indigenous art. Therefore, it lost its initial purpose of bringing international experimental art to India. Strong control of cultural development by the state recurred when art critic and historian Geeta Kapur wanted to initiate the Delhi Biennale in 2005, lacking financial support by the government (ibid.: 46).

Robert E. D'Souza points out that the reforms through economic liberation of post-independence India in the 1990s led to an increased international interest in Indian arts and a more contemporary and internationally focused Indian art practice. According to D` Souza, those developments culminated in the entry of India in the 54th Venice Biennale 2011 and were followed by the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, founded by Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu – both Kerala-born artists, well-known internationally and nationally and working in Mumbai (D'Souza 2013: 298f). D` Souza argues, "Both events have become key markers of India's positioning onto a global understanding of India through contemporary art" (D'Souza 2016: 32). Besides those events, the inclusion of two Indian artists (Nalini Malani and Riyas Komu, co-founder of the Kochi Biennale) in the 52nd Venice Biennale and the inclusion of Riyas Komu in the Gwangju Biennale in South Korean in 2010 were also paving the way for the Indian biennial. The Gwangju Biennale is one of the leading contemporary art biennials in Asia. Ranjit Hoskote curated the Gwangju Biennale in 2008 and the first Indian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2008. He has written widely about the Gwangju Biennale, describing it as "biennial of resistance" because of its social and political curatorial approach (ibid.: 40). His curatorial experience played an essential role in supporting the co-founders to develop a curatorial model for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. In the first Kochi-Muziris Biennale publication "Against All Odds" (2012) Hoskote writes in his essay "The catalytic role of the biennale" about the significant aspect of invisible aids supporting such international festivals:

The gestation period for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale has involved extensive discussions and consultations between the founders and a wide range of participants in global biennale culture: curators, politicians, theorists, critics, managers, artists, civic bureaucrats, industrialists, foundations. . . They have acquainted themselves not only with the visible manifestations of such international festivals but also with the vast infrastructure that supports and sustains such endeavors, which usually remains invisible. (Hoskote 2012: 183)

Launching a new biennale in the periphery of India in the city of Kochi counteracts the metropolitan art centres and elites as well as the existing structures of the Indian art networks.

Placing the Biennale in Kochi was according to D'Souza an example of a national "biennale effect" that challenges the existing structures by creating a "more independent and alternative space for art while suddenly giving Kochi a national and international focus through art." (D'Souza 2016: 31f). By locating the biennial in Kochi, the co-founders are reacting to the focus on well-established centres such as Delhi or Mumbai with flourishing art infrastructure. Exhibiting national and international art could be an important strategy to critically develop a region without commercial pressure, which is more present in highly developed urban centres.

Thus, just as we might understand India's present need for the Biennale as a confluence of differing economical, political, social and cultural forces and byways, it is important to consider if the Biennale as a critical forum can still offer a place of 'difference' and resistance to the forces of globalization, which, as with anywhere else, threaten India with both cultural homogenization and conservatism, even fundamentalism. (D'Souza/Manghani 2016: 11)

The statement of D'Souza and Manghani alludes to the idea of the biennial's potential to resist the homogenised capital world and underline differences in a universalised global world. Therefore, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale Foundation might subtitle their format as "People's Biennale" or "It's our Biennale" referring to the social force of art.

5.3. A "People's Biennale"

Placed outside from the centres of Indian contemporary art, the South Indian state of Kerala is still very rich in cultural events and festivals, hosting a well-established international film festival, a literary festival, and a theatre festival. Besides a highly literate society, Kochi's population is characterised by/inhabits various religious communities, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. The origins of the cosmopolitan city of Kochi as the centre of India's spice trade, go back to ancient times (D'Souza/Manghani 2016: 4). The Indian social theorist Ashis Nandy is describing Kochi as "one of the few cities in India where the precolonial traditions of cultural pluralism refuse to die." (Nandy 2000: 295). Kochi is one of India's largest harbours and has become a leading centre of the Indian Navy in the last fifty years. According to Nandy, Kochi, "for its residents is the ultimate symbol of cultural diversity and religious and ethnic tolerance" (ibid.: 295). The city still carries the traces of its history, which spans at least six centuries, as a place of encounter between China, Africa, Southeast Asia, West Asia and Europe. At least 14 communities still live in the city, including Jews, Eurasian Parangis, Tamils and Saraswats (ibid.: 295f). Nandy argues that Kochi's population is shaped by communal friendship and religious tolerance, as the city is not multicultural from the ground up, but by being multicultural itself (ibid.: 325).

The title of the Biennale refers to the mythical past of Kochi, to Muziris, an ancient port city (1st century B.C.), which was flooded in the 14th century and is believed to be close to Kochi (Pocock 2013: 288). Curator of the first edition, Ranjit Hoskote believes that the participating artists are following in the footsteps of „merchants, scholars, soldiers and religiosi – whether Roman, Jewish, Arab or Persian – who have arrived in these parts over the centuries, making it their home, infusing it with their cultural contributions.” (Jhaveri 2017: 55). In addition to its cosmopolitan tradition, Kochi is also marked by its history of colonialization and colonial trade through the Portuguese colonial power by international trade with the Netherlands and Great Britain. Spice trade brought prosperity to the region, but under the influence of a colonialist system in favour of the imperial powers that controlled and ruled the region (Pocock 2013: 288).

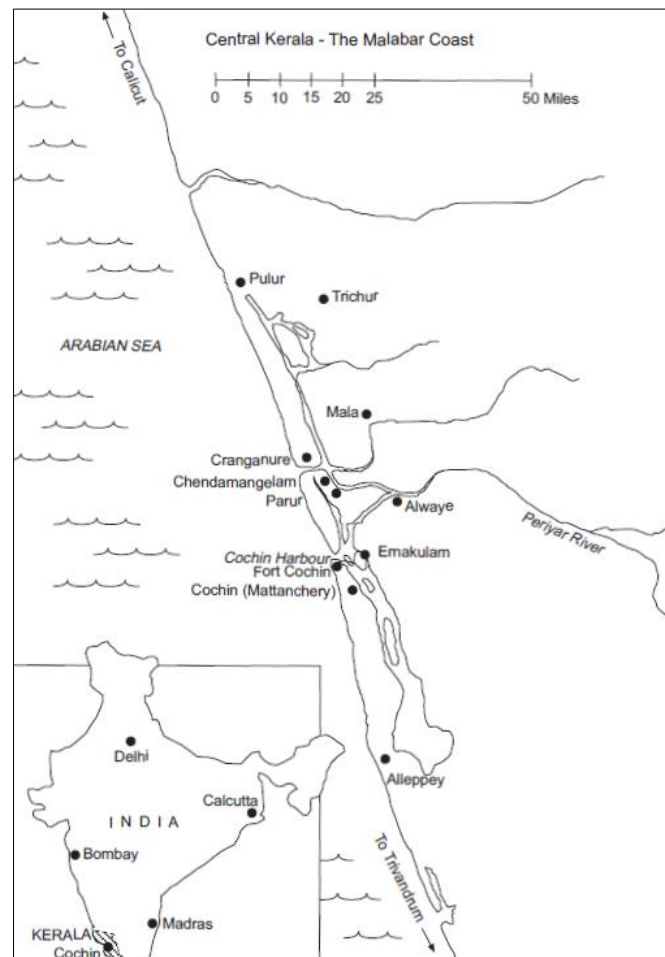


Figure 5. Location of KMB, Fort Kochi, Mattancherry and Ernakulam - city of Kochi and district of Ernakulam

The port city of Kochi, a first-class trade and business centre since ancient times, has become a magnet for tourism in India, described as a place of lush tropical beauty and "Queen of the Arabian Sea". Although it is neither as flourishing nor as renowned as Indian mega cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru or Chennai, Kochi has gradually developed into a major economic and commercial centre, home to a population of around 2.1 million people, with an increasing consumption of luxury goods and real estate (Joy/Belk 2019). Kochi's more recent history is characterised by a long-term Communist government which encouraged a politically active population (D'Souza/Manghani 2016: 5).

The idea to plan the Biennale in Kerala came during a meeting of artists and founders Krishnamachari and Komu with the cultural minister of Kerala. During their conversation he asked the artists "to suggest an event that would reaffirm the state's position on the cultural map. (...) something that would draw global attention to Kerala and at the same time, something that would inculcate a cultural ecosystem in the state." (KBF 2012: 16). The final decision of the Biennale's organisation was made by the Prime Minister in New Delhi (ibid.).

On the twelfth day of the twelfth's month of the year 2012, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, subtitled as 'India's first biennale', was inaugurated. At the outset, the project encountered political resistance, particularly in terms of funding by the state (D'Souza/Manghani 2016: 3). Malayalam media published accusations of corruption and overspending of public funds in 2011. According to the KMB Foundation it was a misleading report of the first instalment of public funds to renovate an exhibition space in Kochi. As a reaction to the political opposition of Keralan art scholars and critics the Biennale Foundation put its effort in promoting the Biennale as "People's Biennale. Director of the Biennale Foundation, Bose Krishnamachari, explains, "Since our project was premised on a rejection of elitism, we campaigned to connect with the local community directly." and further argues, the KMB has already "evolved very organically into a 'People's Biennale'" (Krishnamachari 2018: 152). He highlights the involvement of local people, supporting the construction of the venues and working as volunteers during the Biennale. It developed into a People's Biennale, as they connected directly with the local community, distributing brochures in Malayalam and holding presentations and literary programmes in schools and colleges. Posters showing ordinary people with the slogan "It's Our Biennale" were spread all over the cities. The word "biennale" has entered the public imagination. Overall Krishnamachari stresses that the Biennale "showed the world new possibilities" and that a "biennial could both be rooted in the cultural ethos nurtured by the local community and invite the richness of international interventions in contemporary

art.” (ibid.: 152f). Beside their focus on popular participation they also put emphasis on the artist-led approach towards biennial making and the formation of a community of participating artists, local population and traders. The rawness of the venues and the old heritage buildings are considered as refreshing alternative to the white cubes associated with art fairs, galleries and other biennials around the world (D’Souza/Manghani 2016: 4f).



Figure 6. Kochi Biennale Foundation, Posters “It’s my/our biennale”

The success of the project of India’s first biennial is also related to the local conditions of Kochi and Kerala, which was thematised by the KMB Foundation Team and my interlocutors. Krishnamachari refers to the Kerala model of development (Krishnamachari 2017: 153). Since the later 1970s, several international development scholars have considered the Southern state of Kerala as a model of development. During the past four decades Kerala’s development has been exceptional: “Public action, including both progressive state interventions and popular movements; has brought about high levels of social development and improved living conditions – particularly for lower classes – in spite of low per capita income and nearly stagnant economic growth rates.” (Véron 2001: 601). Manghani and D’Souza argue that the political history and “social consciousness” is very significant to the social scope of the biennial project and the notion of the Biennale as “People’s Biennale” (Manghani/D’Souza 2016: 84). The former director of Tate Modern and participant of the Kochi Biennale, Chris Dercon, argues, “The Kochi Biennale is not restricted to the demands of the West that whenever you do a biennale in Africa, in Northern Africa, in the Middle East or in Asia that it has to be about

post-colonialism. Kochi Biennale is freeing itself up from all such restraints of other biennales. It's not about marketing. It's not about tourism. It is really a people's biennale." (Dercon 2014 cited in Komu et al. 2017: 84). He also considers the Biennale as "productionist", due to its curator-led and practice-based approach and the many site-specific works being made during the biennale. Dercon states it is "not only making a difference, it is also showing us the way how to make things differently." (ibid.).

The aim of the Kochi Biennale Foundation is to evoke a dialogue between artists, curators and the public. New Indian and international perceptions of art and aesthetics should be discussed and alternatives to the political and cultural concepts of the West should be postulated:

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to explore the hidden energies latent in India's past and present artistic traditions and invent a new language of coexistence and cosmopolitanism that celebrates the multiple identities people live with. The dialogue will be with, within, and across identities fostered by language, religion and other ideologies. The Biennale seeks to resist and interrogate representations of cosmopolitanism and modernity that thrive by subsuming differences through co-option and coercion. (URL 8)

D' Souza argues that, beside the factor of tourism and its benefit for local politicians and business people, the Kochi Biennale is "clearly beyond developing only an art tourism spectacle but rather keen to draw on the alternative perspectives that art might bring to a community both in the city of Kochi and beyond, built on a radical history of politics and radical ideas." (D'Souza 2016: 37-38).

The statements subsumed here, reflect the aspects of the so-called discursive exhibition or a biennial of resistance and a response to the growing proliferation of biennials and the discourse on the critical reflection of the format. The cultural theorists Manghani and D'Souza are contributing with their scholarly publication to the critical discourse around the biennial phenomenon and thereby solidify the Kochi-Muziris Biennale as discursive biennial writing back counternarratives of art and art production. Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, the founders, are proposing a "People's Biennale" to counteract the prejudices of elitist and capitalist ambitions by integrating the locals in the process of exhibition making. The curator, Chris Dercon insists on the solely social purpose of the Biennale and its power in making a difference, in making a change.

6. “Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life” – A Case Study

Imagine those pushed to the margins of dominant narratives speaking; not as victims, but as futurisms’ cunning and sentient sentinels. And before speaking, listening to the stone and the flowers; to the older women and wise men; to the queer community; to critical voices in the mainstream; to the whispers and warnings of nature.

Anita Dube, Curator’s Note KMB 2018

There have been novelties at this 4th Biennale. Old female artists, including those who died, were exhibited. On the one hand, not only the latest art projects but also past works were displayed. On the other hand, young and unknown artists were given a stage. Anita Dube states, “You will see a lot of aged artists who would break the idea of the young and the new. We have side-lined many wonderful artists as I found it important to bring these talents forward and let everybody enjoy their work.” (URL 9). Besides the fact that Anita Dube was the first female curator to be announced at the KMB, over fifty percent of the exhibiting artists were women. In the context of the gender theme, she also hosted artists from queer communities. Site-specific installations and projects engaged with current social, political and environmental issues to reflect critically and initiate conversations. A focus on regional particularities was also placed through various works of art, which are based on traditional techniques such as weaving, fabrics and embroidery.

In keeping with the curator's vision and the spirit of mutual artistic exchange, the edition included four infra-projects and a “knowledge laboratory” as part of the curatorial concept. To rethink the singular, top-down curatorial approach and the standard biennial format, the four projects were organised by different artists groups. The infra-projects include Gond artists from Bhopal incorporating popular motifs within the traditional art form of wall painting; Second, the Sister Library, a travelling library of books written by women, was conceptualised by artist and activist Aquí Thami. There was the food project Edible Archive, serving varieties of indigenous rice at a footstall at the Biennale. Fourth, the Srinagar Biennale, a biennale within the biennale, displayed a wide range of creative expressions around Kashmir (KBF 2018: 2).

The “knowledge laboratory” located in the temporal building of the Pavilion, was envisioned by the curator as space which is non-hierarchical concerning the positioning of different knowledge. Within the infra-projects and the discursive space of the Pavilion the curator attempted to thematise issues of community, inclusivity and interconnectedness. The artworks and projects should evoke conversation to initiate a dialogue within the structure of the 4th Kochi-Muziris Biennale (ibid.). To examine the Biennale in terms of its attempted discursivity

and inclusivity, it was essential to observe the various exhibition sites and the events taking place at the Pavilion. But, not only the curatorial concept formed a framework for my field research, but also incidences that took place during the biennial in the Kochi region.

On 8 August 2018, five months before the KMB started, Kerala was hit by the worst floods in nearly a century after days of torrential rainfall in the monsoon season. Ten of thousands of people were displaced and almost two thousand houses were damaged (URL 10). The Kochi Biennial Foundation announced an art auction ARK (Art Rises for Kerala), an attempt to bring the Indian and international community together to help Kerala in its time of need. ARC was a major auction of modern and contemporary art, which took place on January 18, 2019, during the Biennale. At the event, which auctioned 42 artworks of modern and contemporary art, Rs. 3.2 million (37 718,11 Euro) was collected to be donated to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund. This fund is an initiative of the Government of Kerala, which was set up during the floods to provide emergency aid and rebuild the damaged infrastructure throughout the state (URL 11). In addition to the art auction, the KBF wanted to reuse the construction material of the temporal Pavilion – a main venue of the KMB 2018. Dozens of homes would be built from the structure of the Pavilion (see Chapter 6.2.2.). Besides the KBF's rebuilding efforts, Anita Dube integrated responses to the flood in the exhibition to react to the massive loss of lives and livelihood (URL 12). The various artist changed their ideas and engaged through site-specific projects with the flood, creating references to issues of displacement, climate change and commodities (see Chapter 6.3.1).

“Me too” voices have also been raised at the beginning of the Biennale. First, Riyas Komu, co-founder of the KBF, had to resign from his position after accusations of harassment in October 2008. On 13 Dec 2018, the second day of the Biennale opening week, new allegations against the prominent artist Subodh Gupta have been raised. A group of mainly young artists had organised themselves and gave a public statement during a performance at the Pavilion. It was a first attempt to initiate a discussion. Further, it challenged the Biennale and its curator to react to it, as they have declared the space of the Pavilion to be an inclusive, open platform for discussion and insurrection (see Chapter 6.4.2).

Furthermore, on January 2, 2019 protests erupted after two women entered the Sabarimala temple. In September 2018, India's Supreme Court decided to lift a formal ban that prohibited girls and women between the ages of 10 and 50 from entering the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala. The 13th-century shrine is located on a hill in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala and is dedicated to the Hindu deity Ayyappa. After the verdict was passed, a dozen of female pilgrims

tried to enter the temple, facing resistance. In the early morning of Jan 2 lawyer, Bindu Ammini and Dalit activist Kanakadurga managed to enter the temple. The violent protest followed in Kerala and Kochi (URL 13). The regional strike made itself felt with silence in Fort Kochi, as no visitors came to the city and the Biennale that day because the means of transport were shut down (field note, 02 Jan 2019). These incidents become particularly interesting in the context of the Biennale, as the curator claims to bring marginalised voices to speak, including women's voices.

Anita Dube's curatorial approach was to create a place for community, for possibilities of a non-alienated life, for dialogue and exchange by listening to the voices that have been marginalised by dominant narratives (Dube 2018: 24). Her approach seems to reflect the modes of discursive exhibition practices, which are discussed based on my field research data. In a way, my recordings make a particular selection of the exhibition. They are based on statements, descriptions and narratives of my interlocutors; on participant observations during guided tours at Aspinwall and the explanations of the art mediators; on the descriptions and contextualisation of the artworks by the curator; on the talks and discussions taking place at the Pavilion; and the presentation of the exhibition by publications of the Biennale Foundation. Based on this collected data, which are fragments of discourses on the display, I investigated how forms and techniques of discursive exhibiting are used in the specific context of the fourth Kochi Biennial to produce knowledge and meaning around contemporary art.

My examination concentrates on four essential parts. Within this empirical part, I begin by outlining the curatorial frame to understand the stories the curator wants to tell. I then go on by describing the infrastructural framework of the exhibition, including the exhibition venues and the impact of the Biennale on the city and its residents. With the analysis of the infrastructure, I attempt to bring into focus the site-specific aspects of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, which shape the Biennale and vice. In the third section, I examine the exhibition itself in more detail concerning the issues of site-specificity and local particularities. In the last part, I try to investigate the discursive platform of the Pavilion.

6.1. Curator's Story

The curator's note printed on a large poster, placed in the central courtyard of the main venue, introduced the 4th Biennale in colourful capital letters saying, "Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life". On the exhibition's opening day, exhibiting artists, guests, visitors and sponsors were photographed in front of the poster and gathered around the curator at the

courtyard, where Anita Dube inaugurated the biennial at noon within a flag hoisting ceremony. In the crowd, I was able to get a good overview of the Biennale’s participants. All participants were identified with passes, which they carried around their neck on colourful lanyards: The artists wore light blue; volunteers had red strings, the art mediators purple; dark blue identified members of the program management and green signified Foundation Team. After the flag hoisting, a guided tour with the curator was supposed to take place. However, since the number of visitors was so high, Anita Dube invited them to wander through the exhibition alone. In this sense, she added that it was better to have an individual experience without the curator’s subtext (field note, KMB Opening, Dec 12, 2018). In this way, she already referred to her curatorial vision, which included to search for possibilities for deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge – as she later notes: “I want to be liberated from the terrible position of power, as curator and authority” (field note, Let’s Talk, 13 Dec 2018).



Figure 7. Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life 2018, Curatorial Note at Aspinwall House

6.1.1. Anita Dube

Anita Dube was born in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and lives and works in New Delhi. Her education in art history and encounter with the leftist Radical Painters and Sculpture Association in Vadodara (formally known as Baroda) in Gujarat in the 1980s strongly

influenced Dube's art practice by analysis and critique of social and political conditions (Pande 2008: 176). The Radical Painters (1985-1989), also known as the Radical Group, was a short-lived but influential collective of Keralan artists, who had studied at Maharaja Sayajirao University's Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda. The leftist politics and resistance movements have influenced many of the members in their home state of Kerala. They rejected the prevailing ideas about artistic creation with figurative and narrative tendencies at Baroda's Faculty of Fine Arts and accused the art world of commercialisation. They were also extremely critical of what they saw as the bourgeoisie, whom they criticised for their fascist tendencies. The group organised an exhibition "Questions and Dialogue", held in 1987 in Baroda at the Faculty of Fine Arts, and published, making the group's intentions public. This text was written by Anita Dube, the only female and non-Keralan Member of the collective (Jhaveri 2017: 55). This little insight into the Radical Group shows Dube's political engagement and her relation to Kerala, as well as to the Keralan artist and helm of the group K P Krishnakumar, whose drawings were exhibited at the 2018 KMB. K P Krishnakumar's sculpture *Boy Listening* (1985) is integral Anita Dube's conceptualisation of the Biennale. She notes, "It no more exists, but it lives on in the hearts and minds of this short-lived radical movement that has exerted great influence on subsequent generations of artists and thinkers in India" (Dube 2018:21).

In her artistic practice, Dube uses objects and industrial materials as well as performance and text to criticise contemporary socio-political realities. Her work has been widely displayed, also at the first edition of KMB. The selection is in line with the Biennial's tradition of hosting an exhibition under the direction of an artist. Former KBF Secretary Riyas Komu accentuates Dube's critical perspective and its potential to make art relevant and accessible to the public through political and social engagement:

Anita's selection not only reinforces our commitment to having artists at the helm, but also our mission to address contemporary social-political-cultural concerns. Anita is a strong proponent of making art accessible to the public through effective political and social engagement. This is precisely what the Biennale tries to do. (Riyas Komu, URL 14)

6.1.2. The Curatorial Frame

In her curatorial note, Anita Dube is referring to the French philosopher, filmmaker and Marxist theorist Guy Debord. He warns against an alienated society of spectacle that replaces direct human interaction with images. In this context, Dube performs the 4th Biennale edition, named "Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life", which strives to reveal a "politics of friendship". Instead of giving weight to the conceptual, the emotional and intuitive engagement with the

artwork was placed in the foreground, while creating a space of convergence in times of “virtual hyper connectivity” – to put it in the words of the curator (Dube 2018: 24). Art mediator Arun S. Kumar points out the importance of understanding the artwork as an experience, which stimulates your mind and gets in touch with your emotions. According to Arun, who refers to the curatorial frame, to understand everything is not necessary, the experience of seeing is central (Arun S Kumar, 09 Jan 2019). Anita Dube anticipates the Biennale as a place where “pleasure and pedagogy could sit together and share a drink, and where we could dance, and sing and celebrate a dream together”. Possibilities for a non-alienated life explores alternatives to a capitalist society searching for “warm solidarities of community” in the “hope of dialogue”. Voices of women, of the queer community, of nature – in general, minorities and critical voices within the mainstream were the primary focus of this edition. Anita Dube, the first female curator of the Indian Biennale, composed an exhibition – “a symphony of ideas” – with more than 50 percent female artists (Dube 2018: 24).

Apart from the display comprising seventeen venues spread all over the city of Kochi with artworks of 138 artists from 32 countries, the Pavilion, in Malayalam Koodaram (temporal camp), forms the second part: a discursive, performative and non-hierarchical space. Visitors and artists were invited to share any thoughts in any language, rather than delegating authority to the curator (ibid.: 24). Unlike the other parts of the Biennale, the entry to Pavilion site is free; people can steadily drop-in, join the events at the Pavilion, get food at Edible Archives and Café Kudumbashree and participate in Workshops at the ABC Art Room.

The curatorial frame has a focus on women artists as well as traditional art practices shown in various art projects, performances and taught in Workshops at the ABC’ Art Room. Queer communities, documented by exhibiting artists, are another central issue of the Biennale. Whispers of nature are an essential theme, mainly shown in works dealing with the Keralan flood. Besides, art projects were also dealing with migration, colonial past and dangers to democracy as well as the identity, the body and the self. According to the curatorial assistant Anushka Rajendran, a dominant focus of the Biennale is on artists, who are either from the global South or artists questioning the domination of the West. The Biennale should especially pose a platform for marginalised artists – women, indigenous peoples, queer communities and artists from the global South, especially from South Asia and Africa (Anushka Rajendran 2018, 23 Dec 2018).

The curatorial team includes the curatorial director and artist Anita Dube and the two assistants John Xavier and Anushka Rajendran, both Ph.D. students at the school of arts and aesthetics at

the Jawaharlal Nehru University. On the second day of the 2018 Biennale's opening week, the curatorial team held a Let's Talk session on the curatorial framework. In their discussion called "Deconstructing the Curatorial Frame", they wanted to reveal the concept. They tried to shed their authoritarian role as curators to create space for the participation of artists and visitors at the platform called the Pavilion, where anyone can potentially be a curator (field note, Let's Talk, 13 Dec 2018). Anita Dube underscored that a significant challenge of the Biennale is to create a public space and to produce knowledge around contemporary art because there are hardly any contemporary art institutions in the region of Kochi (ibid.). The next step will, therefore, be to discuss the exhibition infrastructure, including the newly established art spaces by the Biennale and their impact on the city and its residents.

6.2. The Exhibition Infrastructure

Curator Anita Dube explained that in Fort Kochi, she was confronted with the paradox of how to organise an exhibition in a place where there are no museums or galleries. Due to the lack of competing contemporary art spaces, the biennial and herself as curator were in a position of power that needed to be dissolved. Hence, Dube chose an exhibition design that allowed for the self-determination of the audience. The Pavilion was intended to compensate for the lack of institutional public space and to provide space for open conversations. Concerning the exhibition, it was vital to create access to the language of contemporary art. The exhibition panels were in English and Malayalam and were aimed to provide simple explanations to the artworks, away from intellectual art conceptions. The different exhibition spaces were organised according to fragments that did not follow a fixed concept to leave space for their own ideas, feelings and affects. Exhibited works of art should not be viewed in a purely intellectual context but should also have the potential to be seductive, in Anita Dube's words, the Biennale "must have some sing in it". In the Kochi-Muziris Biennale Short Guide 2018, all exhibiting artists were presented and ordered by the respective exhibition venue. Next to each described art project was space for visitors to write down their notes or thoughts (see Figure 3, Chapter 1.3.2.). In this context, Anita Dube spoke of a "conversational format", which reflects her idea of creating a space for conversations and dialogues (field note, Let's Talk, 13 Dec 2018).

To understand the exhibition model of the Biennale, which the curator considers as performative and discursive space, it is necessary to examine the infrastructure of the biennial. How does the infrastructure affect one's experience with the art (biennial)? What does it tell us

about the meaning of contemporary art and the role of the biennial for the local community? What does it tell us about the curatorial practice? By taking infrastructure field notes at the various exhibition locations and conducting interviews with participants of the Biennale, the following examination of the venues brings into focus the site-specific infrastructure of the art spaces in which different stories and people – visitors, artists and donors, were interacting. The examination of the venues and the exhibition design provides knowledge about the historicity, contemporaneity and site-specificity, which are all aspects that shape the notion of contemporary art and the discourse around the contemporary biennial (O'Neill 2010, Belting 2009).

6.2.1. Venues

The main feature of the Kochi Biennale, which was repeatedly emphasised by my conversation partners and within the general narratives about the KMB, are the charming locations in which the exhibition takes place. The exhibition venues are construction sites, where artists engage with the spaces to install their contemporary artworks. At the same time, the buildings are steeped in history.

The primary venue for the KMB is Aspinwall House, a 19th-century British heritage building, which was initially the business premises of an English trading company and comprises office buildings, a residential bungalow and several warehouses. Aspinwall faces the sea, such as other venues, which gives a framework and a unique character to the Biennale. Observations and interviews reflect that the charming old buildings and village-like structure of the ancient port and merchant city are one of the most appealing and valuable features of the Biennale. Art professor Parul Dave-Mukherji states that the site-specific advantage could be also a disadvantage from a curatorial point of view.

The advantage is that it's a very idyllic scenic location which would also attract people from all over the world. Climate wise it's perfect, all that is there. The disadvantage from the perspective of a curator is that it is precisely the advantages that a certain kind of touristy ambience is already so much given that sometimes you have to strive hard to work against it. (...) So, from a curator's perspective, it's not an easy location (...) Most of the curators will always tell you that they are interested in the history of the place. It searches back to thousands of years. That's a usual standard narrative, which with they justify the place. But what I mean is from the perspective of (...) contemporary art is no longer aesthetic so the very aesthetic of the place can actually come in the way (...) because of the venue because of the buildings. (Parul Dave-Mukherji, 29 Jan 2019)



Figure 8. Anand Warehouse, Cabral Yard, MAP Project, Aspinwall House (from the top left to the bottom right)

Aspinwall House hosts about 60 percent of the exhibited artworks. The brick building complex was built in 1867 by the British merchant John H. Aspinwall and was the administrative centre of the company. Aspinwall and Company exported various goods, mainly pepper, spices, timber, tea, coffee, lemongrass oil and coir products. Serving as Chairman of Fort Kochi from 1875 until 1879, the businessman Aspinwall had an influential position in the region. Aspinwall House historically stands for a period of prosperity of British private business and the colonial method of promoting individual opportunities for wealth. Fort Kochi's urban design is mostly shaped by this time in history, as are many of the Biennale venues. Today Aspinwall House is co-owned by the Keralan Government and the Indian real estate company DLF Ltd. The Aspinwall complex consists of different buildings, which informed the curatorial design of the fourth edition. Coir Godown³, Bungalow, Laboratory, Admin Block and Store are the contemporary names of the curatorial fragments, which also indicate their original purpose during spice trading periods (KBF 2018: 8). In her talk “Deconstructing the Curatorial Frame” Anita Dube explained that she wanted to build “a frame that moves through fragments”. The different architectures should establish a kind of musicality, in which several fragments represent different instruments and rhythms, which create a “symphony of ideas”. She called

³ Godown signifies in eastern Asia, especially in India a warehouse

this composed musicality a “Singy Biennale”, so that people are not deterred by elitist art but get access through their feelings and affects (field note, Let’s Talk, 13 Dec 2018). Similarly, the Foundation Team explains that the malleability and suppleness of the site are decisive for the open and immediate space – contrary to the intellectual model of the white cube:

The diversity of the exhibition spaces – from large rooms with high ceilings, to narrow corridors, and sea-facing terraces – marks Aspinwall as the representative venue for the Biennale’s overarching spirit of site-specificity and alternative cosmopolitanism. The complex, in particular, exemplifies the move away from the Western white cube model of display, and the essential malleability of the space, enabling a cohabitation of divergent artistic media and expression. (KBF 2018: 8)

In the large courtyard of Aspinwall, around which all the buildings and exhibition spaces gather, I interviewed with the exhibiting artist and photographer Chandan Gomes. His photographic work in the form of books and wallpapers was displayed in the Admin Block of Aspinwall, in two small rooms which are connected by a doorway. He explained how well the exhibition space relates to his work and its cyclical perception.

I don’t like the linear idea of time. So, even in the works, I have put around, I have tried to create like a cycle. You start from any point you can go in and out and you can keep going. There is no start and finish (...) And they were very kind enough to give me a space like that there is a sort of movement. I wanted two doors people to move in and move out, wonder, if it’s the same a photographer or different people and do all of that. (Chandan Gomes, 13 Dec 2018)

Further, Chandan Gomes appreciates the range of audiences that gets to see his work at the Biennale. Compared to the galleries in Delhi, where the artists mostly stay among themselves and discourses remain the same, at his exhibition space at Aspinwall, his work gets a different kind of agency:

A space like this is very important because it gets an audience beyond the artwork. Like a lot of people, I know here I keep meeting at all exhibitions and galleries and keep looking at each other’s work. But I find it a little constrained. It’s the same faces; it’s the same conversations. But you know here suddenly a school group will walk in. They’ll just bring us different agencies to the work or a different kind of discourse, which is what interests me. (...) I’m also very happy putting the work in a very exclusive niche gallery, where I see those forty people only. But it’s fine like I’m fine with anything. But what I like is a certain kind of range (...) I would also love to put those works just out in the open. (Chandan Gomes, 13 Dec 2018)

In the Biennale’s Café facing the Arabian sea and harbour I conducted several interviews with exhibiting artists and had informal talks with visitors. They have highlighted the unique charm of the old exhibition sides and how well the locations integrate into the city, such as exhibiting artist Annu Palakunnathu Matthew explains:

This is one of the ways to see contemporary art outside of the commercial galleries or that white box and this old building and the other buildings that the work is shown in because it's so much part of the city and the city's history (...) I think it's a wonderful way to break down some of these barriers that people have about what is contemporary art. (Palakunnathu Matthew, 14 Dec 2018)

Compared to the other venues, **Cabral Yard** does not hold any vestiges of the past. It is part of the large property of Aspinwall House, located just a few metres across the road. The yard is named after Pedro Álvares Cabral, the first Portuguese navigator who reached Kochi in 1500. Cabral's good relationship with the King of Kochi marked the beginning of trade and, as a result, colonial relations between Kochi and the Portuguese. The Portuguese colonial power retained control of Fort Kochi until the Dutch overpowered them in 1662. In the 19th century, Cabral Yard was taken over by Aspinwall and Company as bailing and storage area for coconut yarn. For the Biennial, the Cabral Yard is a place of change, where a temporary pavilion is created for each edition (KBF 2018: 8). In the 2018 Biennial, the site was constructed as "knowledge laboratory" and the central hub of the Biennial. The **Pavilion** of the Delhi-based firm of Anagaram Architects built the focal point. The building resembled an amphitheatre with transparent, round walls and a gallery running around it. The transparent and discursive role of the Pavilion and Anita Dube's "knowledge laboratory" is discussed in detail in a separate chapter. During the Biennale, numerous programs, lectures, film screenings, discussions and concerts have taken place here. Cabral Yard was also home to the infra-project Edible Archives, a restaurant that reinterprets traditional food and aims to make the cultural memory of the body more tangible. On the other side of the yard was the Cafe Kudumbashree, an initiative to combat poverty among women in Kerala. In the entrance area is the ABC Art Room, which offers art workshops, especially for children. On the other side of the yard was the Cafe Kudumbashree, an initiative to combat poverty among women in Kerala. Admission to Cabral Yard was free during the entire Biennial (field note, infrastructure, 16 Dec 2018)

Like many other Biennale venues, **Pepper House** is very characteristic of a sea-front warehouse in Kochi. The central courtyard, which in the past was used to receive goods when loading and unloading boats, is surrounded by buildings on three sides. One side is facing the street (and the neighbouring medieval mosque), the other side is bordering an overgrown plot of land and the third is facing the sea. However, unlike many other exhibition spaces, Pepper House is actively and consistently involved in many activities of the Kochi Biennial Foundation beyond the Biennial and supports several programs throughout the year. In addition to events such as film screenings and Let's Talk sessions, the Pepper House also hosts longer-term projects organised by the Foundation. One is the Pepper House Residency, where international and

Indian artists create work for two months in Kochi and the other is the Master Practice Studios, young artists can learn from a master artist over a longer period. The cultural space at Pepper House also hosts a café, a design shop and a public library of art and design (KBF 2018: 9).



Figure 9. Café at Pepper House

The library at Pepper House was originally planned as a travelling installation entitled "Laboratory of Visual Art". Founder and patron, Bose Krishnamachari, conceived it as a library on wheels, a temporary, mobile facility that develops out of a constant journey. Now, however, it is in a permanent facility with a growing collection, which is composed somewhat randomly from conversations and interactions with various personalities from art and culture. It is located next to the café and to the entrance area, open for visitors to stop by or to delve into more extensive research. At the long wooden tables, one could spend several hours and days browsing the literature. The library houses over 3000 books and DVDs on photography, architecture, design, fashion, cinema, art, history and culture. The library offers a space for additional research, also on the Biennial, and continually expands the collection with books by participating artists, curators, guest speakers and performers. Apart from the collection of books and films, the library also hosts talks, discussions and interventions. In some ways, the library has become a space for interactive work. At the 2018 Biennial, it hosted the infra-curatorial project Sister Library by Aqiu Thami – an artist, activist, academic and member of the Himalayan janajati Thangmi community. Sister Library is an ever-evolving art project that

evokes reflections in reading and visual culture of the present time. The project aims to create encounters through reading and especially to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of women writers and artists. In this sense, it should act as a resistance to the long history of silencing women's voices. Aqui Thami intends to create “a safe and non-judgmental space for people to come together and explore the pleasure of reading and creating.” (Short Guide 2018: 360).

A short distance away from Pepper House, the MAP Project Space and Anand Warehouse are located along the Bazaar Road. **MAP Project Space**, also known as Dutch warehouse, was part of the Dutch East India Company, which constructed an enormous number of buildings and warehouses to facilitate the transition of Kochi into a vital mercantile hub. MAP Project Space, also known as Dutch Warehouse, is one of these structures. For most of the year, the venue remains closed to the public. The space is used for several programs, collateral projects and by the Biennale. The Museum of Art and Photography, Bangalore (MAP) has made it possible to renovate the space for the exhibition of artworks. **Anand Warehouse** was originally a storage space for spices, rice and pulses. The sea-facing building was once part of the flourishing spice and rice trade business in the first half of the twentieth century. It was an economically prosperous time for the region of Fort Kochi-Mattancherry with 1000 active godowns and warehouses along the Arabian Sea, just like this Biennale exhibition space. Over the last 30 years, this activity has declined due to the emergence of more giant national conglomerates and a shift in the country's dependence on seaports. Anand Warehouse is reflecting the changes taking place in Fort Kochi, where the original purpose of such sites is shifting from trading centres to contemporary exhibition spaces (KBF 2018: 8f).

The hundred-year-old building of **TKM Warehouse** is in Kochangadi in Mattancherry. Before the establishment of the Biennale, the building was not used for a long time and required significant renovations to facilitate the exhibition of works. TKM Warehouse is hosted by the cultural centre, URU Art Harbour, which facilitates artists' residencies, displays, and promotes community engagement and public discourses on art and cultural practices. A little further away from the main event, this venue is located on the quiet waterfront where hand-painted fishing boats moor (ibid.: 9).

The venues Kashi Art Café, Kashi Town House and David Hall are in the centre of Fort Kochi. Anoop Scaria, a pioneer of contemporary art in Kochi and his wife Dorrie Younger opened in 1997 **Kashi Art Café** as a space for artists and for promoting interest in contemporary art. The Café was part of an older Dutch colonial building. Kashi Art Café played a central role in

putting Kochi on the country's cultural map and in developing Kochi as a hub for artists and the arts in Kerala. This space also supported the organisation of Kochi's first contemporary art festival in 2001, named "Encounter". Bose Krishnamachari, president of Kochi Biennale Foundation, started curating exhibitions at Kashi Art Café. By 2005 the local art scene had a strong prominence in India, primarily through the connection with well-known Malayali artist working in Mumbai, such as Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, co-founders of the Biennale. Shortly before the first edition of the Biennale, the Café was bought by Keralan hotelier Edgar Pinto, who is now a silver patron of the Biennale. Besides the permanent art collection in the Café space, the entrance hall of the building is used as an art space, in which temporary exhibitions such as those of the Biennale take place. The **Kashi Town House** was last a family estate. The building itself, with its large windows and minimal ornamentation, is reminding of Dutch colonial architecture. It is believed, however, that it was built later after the English control of Kochi in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Since Edgar Pinto acquired the building in 2015, it has been transformed into an art gallery spanning various levels and spaces (ibid.). Artist Afrah Shafiq exhibited two works in Kashi Town House. She explained in our interview that she chose this venue because, unlike the main venue, it is much quieter, and visitors can take more time there.

I came for a site visit a couple of months back and I liked that space a lot. Because I wanted a very home bedroom kind of feeling. So, that bungalow [Kashi Town House] worked well for me. I also feel like my works take a little time to go through and people in Aspinwall they very like jump from room to room kind of mode. When you come to another space, you've come all the way there, you give it a little more time to see. And I felt that might also work better for more quiet. So that was kind of the logic why we picked that space. (Afrah Shafiq, 16 Dec 2018).

The last place of the exhibition in Fort Kochi is **David Hall**. The heritage building was built in 1695 by the Dutch. The Dutch bungalow is today a famous art gallery and café owned by the CGH Earth group, a Keralan hotel group and a family-owned enterprise. The building was named after David Koder, a Malabari Jewish businessman, who lived there with his family. The Hall's architecture remained relatively unchanged from its original structure made of wood, with a sloped roof and a large garden in the back (KBF 2018: 9).

Compared to other Biennial venues, **Durbar Hall** was renovated to meet international museum standards of display and is placed on the mainland in the district of Ernakulam. The renovations have blurred some of the apparent signs of age that are omnipresent in Fort Kochi's warehouses. The approximately 100-year-old building was originally the courthouse of the King of Fort

Kochi. As the name “Durbar Hall”⁴ suggests, the roughly 100-year-old building was originally the court of the King of Fort Kochi. After the country’s independence in 1947, the complex has been a storage for military vehicles and weapons and served as well as a mobile courtroom. Those various purposes have visibly worn out the structure. In 1998 the building was transferred to the care of Kerala’s Lalithakala Akademi, or Academy of Fine Arts. Later it was converted by the Kochi Biennale Foundation into a “world-class gallery space”, which is used all year round (ibid.). Mr. Satyapal, former Lalit Kala Akademi secretary noted that the Akademi decided to work in partnership with the KBF, as they recognised “the potential for Durbar Hall to play a pivotal role in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and become one of the foremost exhibition spaces in the country (...) with (...) the capacity to host international exhibitions of the highest prestige.”. The renovation of Durbar Hall was one of the first projects realised by the KPF with Government funding (KMPPG 2017: 15).

With the ferry, it takes you 20 minutes from Fort Kochi, where the main exhibition takes place, to Ernakulam, the mainland of the city of Kochi. Compared to Fort Kochi, with its old heritage buildings and unique flair attracting tourists, Ernakulam is a busy financial and commercial centre of Kerala. Durbar Hall is located next to the Ernakulam Shiva Temple, also known as Ernakulathappan Temple, which is considered as the city temple and one of the major Shiva temples in Kerala. When I visited Durbar Hall on 15 Jan 2019, the *Ulsavam*⁵ festival was taking place at the nearby temple, including elephant processions, folklore music and dance. In contrast to this, I experienced the white, bright and air-conditioned rooms of the Durbar Hall Art Gallery, where I was the only visitor that afternoon. Compared to the venues in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry mainly representing site-specific installations, new media art and photography, Durbar Hall is displaying at the 4th Kochi Biennale sculptures, drawings and paintings by deceased, influential contemporary Indian artists, and thus shows a small retro-perspective of contemporary Indian artists. Durbar Hall complies with the global standard of galleries and becomes a “white cube” in the town of Ernakulam (field note, 15 Jan 2019).

Durbar Hall and the other exhibition areas reflect the way of repurposing the old constructions as art spaces and the impact of the Kochi-Muziris Biennial on the region through "creative economy".

⁴ „Durbar“ signifies in India, the court of an Indian ruler.

⁵ Malayali form of the Sanskrit word *utsavam* meaning “festival”

6.2.2. “Creative Economy”

During my field research and interviews, an interesting point came up, which seems to be very crucial for the biennial: The fact that the biennial starts from scratch every time. Most venues are dismantled after the event and remain abandoned until the Biennale begins again. In this context, some questions have come up: What stays and what is lost? Where are the potentials of development and how can the local population benefit from it?

Kochi-Muziris Biennale takes place in various venues centred around Fort Kochi-Mattancherry and Durbar Hall in Ernakulam. The exhibition spaces are, for the most part, heritage properties that have been preserved, reused and redeveloped for the Biennale. Fort Kochi and Mattancherry are historically shaped by global influences through various trade relations with countries across the world, which contributed to an image of the city as multi-cultural, pleasant and inclusive. In this sense, co-founder Bose Krishnamachari states, “We did not choose Fort Kochi; Fort Kochi chose itself for the biennale.”. The way Kochi’s architecture shapes the Biennale, the Biennale forms the city, in a manner that is referred to as “soft urban renewal”⁶ and “creative economy”⁷. This means to gradually improve environments and buildings without causing inconvenience to the residents. The influence on the physical form of Fort Kochi starts with the exhibition venues of the KMB itself.

With governmental funds and donations by private patrons and local business people, spaces such as Durbar Hall, Aspinwall House, Pepper House and Aspinwall were turned into art spaces. Besides economic benefits for the construction industry, the restoration of the buildings is also considered to raise awareness within the local communities towards the reusing of heritage areas. Within Kochi, the demolition and unauthorised alteration of valuable cultural heritage buildings and public spaces is an important issue, as well as the lack of adequate guidelines. Therefore, the restoration of the Biennale venues serves as a useful guideline for owners of such buildings in terms of Dos and Don’ts towards the value of the cultural heritage. The trend of restoration projects can be seen in the various new building uses and typologies, especially art galleries and homestays. New galleries and homestays are opened since the first Biennale edition in 2012. Before the start of 2016, Biennale funds for the improvement of road

⁶ This term is used in the Impact Assessment Report of KPMG to describe the way in which the KMB shapes the city (KPMG 2017: 39).

⁷ In 2001, British academician and entrepreneur John Howkins published the book *The Creative Economy* and established the term „creative economy“, which comprises key creative activities such as art, architecture, crafts, film, music or performance art as well as research (Howkins 2001). Based on interviews with KMB art mediators (Khushboo Patel 2019; Arun S Kumar 2019), the term is used here referring the new use of the heritage buildings as art spaces and its impact on the city.

transport and street repairs were allocated by the Kerala Department of Tourism (KPMG 2017: 39). The Chief Minister of Kerala noted the economic and social benefits of the Biennale:

Though the Biennale is primarily an art event, it has economic and social benefits too. It has energised the tourism sector. The statistics show that lakhs of cultural enthusiasts surged to Kochi from around different corners of the world to view the first two editions. Both Kochi and Kerala benefit from this influx. Pinarayi Vijayan Chief Minister of Kerala (KPMG 2017: 8)

According to the KPMG report on the impact of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, the governmental funds, the rising restorations of old buildings, as well as the increasing distribution of KMB venues across the city, show improvement and rejuvenation of the city infrastructure (KPMG 2017: 39).

In our in-depth interview, art mediator Arun S Kumar explained that in their preparation of the mediation program, they learned about the aspect of “creative economy”. Art mediator Arun S Kumar described the significance of the old buildings and their histories for the unique nature of the biennial.

The space has not been altered much like you feel a connection between the places and the artworks in such a manner. It's not always very refined and polished in a kind of gallery space. I guess that kind of sometimes process people in a certain way. People like that in a certain way (...). It was Coir Godown for a long time because before Biennale, that space was like closed for a long time. Then, due to the Biennale, it was open for the public. It was cleaned up (...). The Laboratory they used to test spices and the quality of whatever they were exporting. And that kind of connection with the past, people like it. (Arun S. Kumar 09 Jan 2019)

Through the establishment of the Biennale, the old buildings are reused and renovated. Arun S Kumar told me about the creative economy approach. It is one aspect of the Biennale's engagement with the local communities. An exhibition infrastructure is installed by transforming existing structures into art spaces for collaborative projects between local, national and international artists. The reused heritage buildings became attractive sides for tourists and opened to the general public. The new utilisation of the former warehouses also reflects an economic and social shift.

In the [mediator] training we were taught something that is called creative economy (...) where the art kind of helps the economy grow in a way, preserves the old buildings and all the infrastructure and everything. That I really like (...). Because I was born and brought up here, sometimes it's very painful to see some old buildings getting pulled down, new buildings coming up in the space. Because once a place kind of loses its old structures in a way, it is also losing its character. Because of the Biennale lot of old buildings are still there. For me, that is a very positive thing, a creative economy. (...) Mattancherry was, at a point of time, a very active trait hub. My friends' fathers used to work in the market, and it was

a very driving trait hub. It was very crowded and all and the trait kind of went out. The market was shifted to somewhere else. So, I don't know if the Biennale had not been there (...) I don't know what would have happened to all those places. (Arun S Kumar 09 Jan 2019)

As a musician, Arun S Kumar is also associated with the URU Art Harbour at the TKM Warehouse, where he could rehearse with his band. Therefore, he realised on a personal level that the creative economy maintains and creates spaces where he can practice and develop his music. A more critical perspective on the creative economy was expressed to me by Mochu and two collaborators of the Biennale. The two staff members explained that all exhibition venues are only temporarily leased by the Biennale for the duration of the exhibition. During the rest of the year, the areas are mostly abandoned, as can be seen by the example of Cabral Yard. When the Biennale is taking place, Cabral Yard hosts among other things the Pavilion and the Art Room and therefore becomes the main area for encounters, discussions and knowledge production. However, it will be demolished after each exhibition. Cabral Yard remains vacant for the rest of the year. In our informal talk, the two collaborators of the Biennale, they questioned the sustainable impact of the biennial for the city and its inhabitants (informal talk, Jan 30, 2019). Similarly, artist Mochu criticised the process of building and demolishing or abandoning the exhibition venues, which begins anew with each Biennale edition. On the one hand, this gives the curators a great deal of freedom regarding the creation of the display and the construction of spaces, such as the Pavilion. On the other hand, a certain infrastructure should be maintained after each biennial, so that there is no need to start over every time.

I think the bureaucracy makes it quite the opposite in the experience in translation into practice. And I mean for instance, Kochi is a tourist space, is one of the main selling points and since it's a recent biennial, it's ok. Still, you know how long can you run on that place you know ultimately you need to have new works by good artists and you need to set it up properly to pay everyone well and so on so forth. (Mochu, 17 Dec 2018)

Mochu mentions that to a certain extent, the biennial is supported by Kochi's ambience and tourism and that in the long run, it is not enough to rely solely on the unique location. Since the first edition, there have been problems getting the exhibition work done on time. Mochu believes that without a sure consistency, the biennial cannot progress. By this, Mochu also refers to the low salaries paid for the Biennale staff, which cannot increase if the organisational structure does not improve (Mochu, 17 Dec 2018).

With an initiative called "recycle. reuse. rebuild" the Kochi Biennale Foundation wants to draw attention to its commitment to "rebuilding the state". In addition to targeted efforts to directly help the people affected by the Kerala flood, the Kochi Biennial Foundation has been working

to restructure its internal processes to maximise its impact in terms of state reconstruction. One such effort is promising to recycle the materials used during the Biennial for relief efforts. In particular, the structure of the Pavilion, which plays a significant role in the fourth edition and the curatorial framework of Anita Dube, will be reused to build houses for displaced families. According to the architects of the Pavilion, the building materials of the temporary space can be reused. The KBF announced that, when the pavilion is dismantled after March 29, 2019, a dozen houses of about 600 square meters each would be built (KBF 2018: 5).

The aspect of sustainability also refers to the Biennale's vision of including the local community, making the used building materials available for them and generally involving them in the process of the construction of the biennial within the city of Fort Kochi. Architect and art mediator Khushboo Patel have sharply criticised the construction of the Pavilion, referring to the sustainability and reusability of resources. She explained that the materials used for the building – steel and plexiglass don't do justice to the idea of sustainability (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019).

What they are saying is that after the Biennale, they are going to demolish the entire structure and they are going to use all the parts to build other buildings in different regions of Kerala. But then I don't know how they are going to use the structure because you know the steel pipes are bent (...) And also this whole idea of using steel (...) they could have made a more sustainable building using probably local materials and they could have explored bamboo as a material more in a better way and also like I don't really like the whole idea of using these plastic flaps because why you want to use plastics in a building (...) and also there is AC inside the Pavilion. (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019)



Figure 10. The Pavilion for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018-19

In our interview, Parul Dave-Mukherji noted that there are always great difficulties with infrastructure in India. In the context of the Biennale, the organisers try to act in an ecologically responsible way, but the problem is to put sustainability into practice. In terms of the Biennale's rebuilding effort and beyond, Dave-Mukherji argues, "there are lot of things happening in the symbolic space. I also don't undermine the importance of symbolic space. But I know their limitations." (Parul Dave-Mukherji, 29 Jan 2019). Artist Mochu believes that, to receive funds, the KBF must promote the contemporary biennial as a cultural event with a commitment to the local population (Mochu, 17 Dec 2018). Architect and urban designer Vidhya Mohankumar, who conducted an impact assessment study commissioned by KBF in 2017, draws a more optimistic conclusion on the impact of the Biennale on the city: "Kochi-Muziris Biennale's collective endeavours are well-aligned to make Kochi a repository for emerging ideas and ideologies which can eventually create different histories that will define the city from this point onwards. The creative city has indeed been birthed." (URL 15). In an informal talk, two staff members of the KMB explained that Fort Kochi transforms during the Biennale: The number of people in the streets doubles, cafés and galleries are opening, many of which close again when the Biennale is over. They question whether a benefit for the residents remains in the interim (informal talk, 13 Jan 2019).

As part of the artists-in-residence graffiti artists transformed street murals in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry (KBF 2018: 6). Wall paintings have always been part of the Biennale since the first edition in 2012. But for the first time, professional artists were commissioned to create street art in public spaces. Programs Coordinator at the KBF, Nibedita Mishra stated: "These paintings on the walls of the Biennale city bring Kochi-ites closer to the world of art" (URL 16). As the city and its surfaces become a canvas for art, the Kochi Biennale attempts to inspire a creative placement movement in Kochi (KPMG 2017: 40). As part of the design of the city walls, not only graffiti art was created, but also letterings such as "It's My Biennale" and wallpapers on which various inhabitants are photographed with the words "It's Our Biennale" (see Fig. 6, Chapter 5.3.).

6.2.3. "It's Our Biennale"

In the streets of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, I could observe some locals wearing buttons saying, "It's my Biennale". Hamsa Veliyathukudy, Secretary of Mattancherry Residents Association, stated, "The locals, most of whom are not very enthusiastic about the international art festival that happens in their locality, are pleased because of developmental activities that made life a bit easier for them. If not for the Biennale, such works would have dragged on

unreasonably.” (KPMG 2017: 40). Although many residents cannot connect to the international art exhibition as such, they are aware that the Biennial can contribute positively to the image of the city. Parts of the local population now perceive Kochi as a biennial city, as one local resident stated: Everyone knows us as the ‘Biennale city’ now.” (ibid.).

Bose Krishnamachari, the director of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, writes in his essay “Of the People, by the People, and for the People” published by the International Biennale Association:

[KMB] has also evolved very organically into a ‘People’s Biennale’. (...) Kochi-Muziris Biennale showed the world new possibilities. A biennial could both be rooted in the cultural ethos nurtured by the local community and invite the richness of international interventions in contemporary art. (Krishnamachari 2018: 152)

He highlights the involvement of local people, supporting the construction of the venues and working as volunteers during the Biennale. According to the director, it developed into a People’s Biennale, as they connected directly with the local community, distributing brochures in Malayalam and holding presentations and literary programmes in schools and colleges. Posters showing ordinary people with the slogan “It’s Our Biennale” were spread all over the cities. The word “biennale” has entered the public imagination (ibid. 153ff.).

The success of the project of India’s first biennial is also related to the local conditions of Kochi and Kerala, which was thematised by the KMB Foundation Team and my interlocutors. Krishnamachari refers to the Kerala model of development (ibid). Since the later 1970s, several international development scholars have stressed the Southern state of Kerala as a model of development. During the past four decades Kerala’s development has been exceptional: “Public action, including both progressive state interventions and popular movements; has brought about high levels of social development and improved living conditions – particularly for lower classes – in spite of low per capita income and nearly stagnant economic growth rates.” (Véron 2001: 601).

My interlocutors and the KMB Foundation has argued that the Biennale very much depends on the local population of Kerala and could not be transferred to any other place in India. The socio-political context of a high literacy rate and a high level of political participation among ordinary people in Kerala is mentioned continuously as a crucial factor for the implementation of the Biennale. Social scientist and artist K.P. Jayasankar, born in Kerala, pointed to the left movement and the accompanying library movement: “Every village had its own library. There is a lot of translation, people here would have read Foucault in Malayalam.” and Anjali Monteiro added to it: “so it’s a very different kind of a culture space you won’t find this that much in other

parts of the country.” (Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar, Dec 14, 2019). In the same way, exhibiting artist Mochu, Afrah Shafiq and Annu P. Matthew describe the Malayali audience as very used to culture and art, referring to the excessive cinematic scene in Kerala. As Afrah Shafiq mentioned, ordinary working people would watch experimental and intellectual films (Afrah Shafiq, 16 Dec 2018).

Compared to the white cube of galleries and museums in Bombay, Delhi or Bangalore, the Biennale with its venues spread all over the city, is more accessible to a local audience. The entrance fee for a three-day ticket is 100 Rupees (about one Euro) and entry on Monday is free. There are two free daily guided tours in Malayalam and English. Also, the entrance to Cabral Yard is open, where events are taking place in the Pavilion as well as the workshops at the ABC’s art room.

The Biennale, I think, has been transformative in terms of how people view contemporary art. I mean the problem is in India we don't have a lot of museums, so this is one of the ways to see contemporary art outside of the commercial galleries or that white box. And this old building and the other buildings that the work is shown in, it's so much part of the city and the city's history. I don't think this is intimidating to the larger audience who live here, so I love the fact that the range of people to art collectors to the chief minister to someone who sells fruit on the side of the street come to see the work. I love that accessibility. (Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, 14 Dec 2018)

The above comment demonstrates the curatorial team’s narrative of *inclusivity*. Instead, some of my interviewees speak of *accessibility*. When it comes to inclusivity, the voices became more critical. While access is provided through a specific infrastructure, for example, the translations to Malayalam, engagement with the artworks and participation in discussions may exclude people outside of the art world. Artist Mochu noted that contemporary art does not yet have a place in the Keralan population’s imagination. On the other hand, cultural festivals associated with traditional art and religion are widespread and part of everyday cultural life (Mochu, 17 Dec 2018). To promote contemporary art, to convey knowledge about it, to reach a local audience and to foster collaborations between international, national and local artists, the 4th Biennale exhibition comprises site-specific artworks and refers to region-specific art practices and socio-political issues.

6.3. Art Projects: Local Particularities and Critical Perspectives

In the café of the large courtyard of the Pepper House consisting of two historic dockside warehouses with Dutch-style clay roofs, I met the curatorial assistant and art scholar Anushka Rajendran. During our talk, Anushka Rajendran, perceives the Biennale as an inclusive place

due to its focus on feminism and the global South, while creating a dialogue within the non-institutional space of the Pavilion. Around half of the exhibiting artists are from India. They had only selected international artists, who are very critical of European and North American hegemony. They supported young and unknown artists, and in general artists from South East Asia and Africa, which made up most of the exhibiting artists. They wanted to include more women artists, Dalit artists and artists with no formal training (Anushka Rajendran, Dec 23, 2018). Five of my interlocutors were untrained artists, exhibiting for the first time at a more significant exhibition. They all explained to me that they do not perceive themselves as artists and instead define themselves through their practices, such as documentary photography, research or working with fabrics. Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, for example, are social scientists and make ethnographic films. They found it interesting to see at the Biennale people coming from different spaces and practices such as tribal folk artists or participants with an academic background like themselves (Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, Dec 14, 2018).



Figure 11. *Infra-Project Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam at KMB 2018*

The exhibition should reflect Anita Dube's fragments of ideas expressed by marginalised voices. It started with the first exhibition space when entering the complex of Aspinwall. It showed the work of Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam from the Pardhan Gond tribe, who produce *Gondi bhitti chitra* paintings. This means making *dhigna* (a type of pattern) on mud walls, which is more practiced by women, as they decorate the houses by making *dhigna*.

Traditionally it is made on festivals or special occasions like weddings. Jangarn Singh Shyam (1962-2001) started making the *dhigna* on cane mass and paper in Bhopal. His works were also exhibited at the „Les Magiciens de la terre“. The paintings and motifs are based in storytelling, stories of gods and goddesses. Durgabi and Subhash Vyam combine the old stories with new ones and motifs such as airplanes have found their way into their work of art (field note, Gond Art, 03 Jan 2019). At Aspinwall, the traditional wall painting practice was transferred to wood patterns with *dhigna*'s decorating all walls of the exhibition room (see Fig. 12). Following the unspecified path of the exhibition, one could explore the various fragments of the show, which were not linearly constructed. In the courtyard of Aspinwall, the female textile artists Santha KV installed colourful weaving textiles around the Mango tree. Behind the installation, one entered the Coir Gowdown building and encountered Arunkumar HG sculpture, *Construction II* (2018), a human figure made from wood and cement, which the artists collected from construction sides (see Fig. 13).



Figure 12. CON-struction I and artist Arunkumar HG (on the left) at KMB 2018

By reworking industrial waste, he wants to comment on environmental issues, to share and learn from local and global discourses on sustainable living. His second work, *Vulnerable Guardians* (2018) are photographs of farmers printed on reclaimed wood. The depicted farmers were affected by the agrarian crisis and forced to migrate to the cities to find jobs, often as security guards to support their families in the village (Arunkumar HG, 14 Dec 2018). One room further, the queer feminist artist Tejal Shah showed her *Hijra Fantasies Series* (2006). In the photographs, she restages iconic mythological oil paintings with transgender protagonists. The path of the exhibition continued with the critical feminist artist Sonia Khurana, who shows in the short film *Bird* (1999) her naked female body (Dube 2018: 54ff). In the following corridor, the photographs of South African artist Santu Mofokeng and the Palestinian artist Rula Halawani are displayed opposite each other. Mofokeng explores the landscapes of townships in South Africa during Apartheid and Halwani documents the spatial implications of military occupation in Palestine through checkpoints and walls. A little further were Madhvi Parekh's sculptures and paintings, which are influenced by her childhood memories of traditional decorative motifs and floor designs of *Rangoli*. When you came out of the Coir Godown Building, you found yourself at Vipin's open kitchen, back at the yard of Aspinwall, drinking a cup of tea (field note, 04 Jan 2019).

This small excerpt from my participant observations shows only a fraction of the exhibition, but it should reflect Anita Dube's thematic issues and the diversity of the different exhibition fragments. Within the variety of the display, two focal points for my research have emerged. On the one hand, I depict the exhibited textile and weaving art concerning local particularities. Second, I focus on site-specific art projects and regional engagements. In this respect, I attempt to show how the biennial refers to intra-regional themes and how it engages with local particularities.

6.3.1. The Loom



Figure 13. Missing Route by Bapi Das at KMB 2018



Figure 14. Missing Route by Bapi Das

Artist Bapi Das explained in the interview that he has not yet reached the point to call himself an artist. Exhibiting at the Biennale is his major breakpoint in his life for now. His work is entirely influenced by his view of an autodriver (rickshaw-driver) through the city of Kolkata. Whatever he came across while driving through the town and whatever came across his vision – small dreads, different parts of the world, his own experiences and panels of the city – collide into his compositions of embroidery and fabric (see Fig. 14 & 15). Bapi Das had no formal training and got in touch with the medium of stitching through his mother and sister (Bapi Das, Dec 13, 2018). This leads us to a significant issue of KMB 2018 – artworks around the techniques of stitching, weaving, suing described best with the metaphor of “the loom”.

For artist Afrah Shafiq it was the first time showing her work at an exhibition. In our interview, she stressed that unlike the other editions, the fourth Biennale did not choose a lot of established artists conventionally, rather young artists and unknown artists were participating and the work they are presenting “is coming from the heart”. Afrah Shafiq was showing *Sultana’s Reality* in an interactive space. It is a web-based animated project, where the viewer clicks through a collage of texts and miniature paintings, following Sultana on her journey through the (hi-)stories of Indian women, who have challenged societal conventions. Her other work, she exhibited, is called *st. itch* (2018), where she combines historical depictions of women sewing with those of their cross-stitched fabric. She compares this stitching technique with new computer pixels. The project is based on extensive literature research of picture and text archives of women sewing in Victorian England (Afrah Shafiq, Dec 16, 2018).

It’s kind of interesting how the weaving loom has ended up becoming so prominent in the Biennale. (...) There are so many works around the loom and around weaving and around embroidery and that’s so nice. Because it’s such a universal thing. So many different cultures and so many different countries have seen the loom motive for instance. (Afrah Shafiq, Dec 16, 2018)

Shafiq emphasised in our talk that the connecting motif of embroidery and weaving runs through the whole exhibition (ibid.). The Biennale seems to reflect the work with fabrics as a unifying force. Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar were describing the meaning of the loom for their work:

Weaving together images and words (...) that’s why we chose the idea for loom. The loom is as you know a place where various strands come together to make the fabric, they belong to different sections to different classes to different art practices, but we are thinking about how we can weave a story around the city. (Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar, 14 Dec 2018)

It's not only about the art practice of weaving or stitching, but also the motif works as a vehicle to weave or stitch together stories and living worlds. For the Biennale Monteiro's and Jayasankar's remastered their ethnographic documentary *Saacha* (The Loom) on Mumbai's cotton mills from 2001. The film portrays the decline of the mills in its final stages, telling the stories of mill workers. It weaves together the stories of the poet Narayan Surve, the painter Sudhir Patwardhan and the musician Shahir Amar Shaikh, which were integrated into the city's fabric.

The original film which was made in 2000 has three different strands roughly there is a painter (...) Sudhir Patwardhan (...), but at the same time he has been part of the left movement in Mumbai and he has been documenting working-class life (...) inspired by Marxism and he has (...) brought in narratives (...) various strands, stories into his paintings. (...) And then of course, there is the poet who was found abandoned as a baby on the street by textile mill worker and he was brought up by the millworker and he is not much educated. He was part of the working class he lived on the street, he was a child labourer in the textile mill and then he actually wrote. He was one of the most significant poets in Marathi, in the local language, one of the revolutionary kinds of poets. (K P Jayasankar, 14 Dec 2018)

Monteiro and Jayasankar are documenting the disappearance of the mills, the working-class movement and artistic forms of expression represented by the people portrayed in the film. Unknown histories, marginalised knowledge, the diversity of art practices – all those issues converge in the topic of the loom (Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar, 14 Dec 2018). Afrah Shafiq wants to push the boundaries of hierarchies, which created the difference between art and craft: “embroidery, suing is just this cute non-serious thing that women did, which is not really art, but a painting of a women suing is art”. Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar are working with different marginalised communities from prisoners to transgender people to indigenous communities and workers, looking at inclusion and exclusion in different contexts. Their work challenges the hegemony of knowledge that marginalises local pearls of wisdom (Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar, 14 Dec 2018). Both art projects, *Saacha* (2001) and *st. itch* (2018), approach historical narratives from a marginalised perspective. Afrah Shafiq sums up: “Several histories exist, and certain histories are doubted as the only history. But there isn't one history” (Afrah Shafiq, Dec 16, 2018).



Figure 15. Tania Candiani's sound installation *String Loom* at KMB 2018

There were several other works around the loom presented at the Biennale, which challenge the hierarchy between art and craft. Mexican-based artist Tania Candiani's *String Loom* (2018) transformed a local loom, which was in disrepair, in an interactive musical instrument and could be played by the visitors (see Fig. 16). For this collaborative project, Candiani brought together the Mexican luthier Carlos Chinchilla and the local luthiers, Ranesh Reju and Vinay Murali, in Kochi. During their several weeks of work on-site, the luthiers replaced the threads of the loom with sitar strings and assembling sound boxes, turning the found loom into a music instrument. Candiani's project points at Kerala's slowly dying art of handloom weaving (Dube 2018: 50). The *String Loom* also hosted several jam sessions, where musicians could play the repurposed string instrument. During a guided tour, the instrument became a magnet for visitors shortly after they were informed by the guide that this work of art might not only be touched but also played (field note, free guided tour, Jan 04, 2019). Another weaving work was Santha KV's outdoor installation on a mango tree in the gardens of Aspinwall; the woven fabric was inspired by the intertwined root caps of the Banyan tree (see Fig. 17). Santha KV is a self-taught textile artist and teaches traditional weaving. In 1989, she co-founded the Tasara International Weaving Centre in Beypore, at a time when traditional hand weaving in Kerala was beginning to disappear. *Tasara* is Sanskrit and means weaver's shuttle. The Tasara Centre hosts international artists. Santha KV translates the traditional weaving in a contemporary form and

brings together contemporary artists and weavers all over the world (Dube 2018: 246). Santa KV's installation of woven textiles stretched like a net around the trees in the Aspinwall garden and created a colourful space that also reflected the colours of the biennial logo that hung prominently on the opposite side (field note, infrastructure Aspinwall, 16, Dec 2018).



Figure 16. Santha KV's outdoor installation in a mango tree at Aspinwall, KMB 2018

In a historical and cultural context, the artworks around weaving reflect the decline in the manufactured textile industry, such as Candiani's *String Loom* (2018) and Monteiro's and Jayasankar's *Saacha* (2001). The centrality of embroidery and weaving at the Biennale broach the issue of the boundaries between popular culture, high and low art, between avant-garde and arts and craft. Those boundaries seem to be demolished within the context of contemporary art and the biennial. Local materials and practices are integrated to highlight local particularities and site-specificity to put the city in Southern Kerala on the global map. But also to critically question the changes in society through the capitalist industry. In the framework of textile art, there have been exhibiting artists who are self-taught and had no access to formal art education. Therefore, they are challenging the hegemonies of the art world.

6.3.2. Site-specific Engagement

The Kochi Biennial Foundation published a 12-page newspaper, "Kochi Contemporary", which was distributed free of charge during the Biennial. The paper explains the different programs of the fourth edition, from the Student's Biennial to collaborative projects, painting workshops, artist residencies, art mediation programs, open art library and site-specific art. The emphasis is on the broader framework of the exhibition, which is distinguished by various site-specific activities. The artists are understood as curators, mediators and collaborators and the relationship between the artwork and the site is particularly highlighted. The main message of the Biennial Foundation says that Kochi serves "as a fertile repository of inspiration" and evokes the "Biennale's overarching spirit of site-specificity" (Kochi Biennial Foundation 2018: 8, 12). Like most contemporary biennials, the Kochi Biennale draws attention to the public through site-specific art, large-scale installations, performances and workshops. The site-specific project is considered to have the potential of creating dialogue and marks a transition to the discursive exhibition (Kompatsiaris 2014, Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010). Ferguson and Hoegsberg describe it as "a pivot in the movement from art to audience." (Ferguson/Hoegsberg 2010: 368). Within the framework of the Kochi Biennale, the art works are intended to transform the environment into an immediate experience for the viewer. Site-specific installations in Kochi are viewed as a record of history, the search for alternative histories, challenging notions of reality, time and space and creating sensorial experiences. In this environment, the rich historical background of the exhibition sites also plays a vital role (KBF 2018: 12).

The work on site has been central since the first edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennial. This involves various aspects – artists stay on site for a more extended period, processing their experiences of their engagement with the region in the form of materials or conducting in-depth research on socio-political and historical contexts of the area. While visiting artists discover connections between Kochi and their home country or earlier works, artists who stay longer in the region try to relate their stories and encounters, collected during this time, to their knowledge and personal experiences. A fundamental aspect of the fourth edition is that artists tried to create spaces that can be claimed by visitors for political and community engagement (KBF 2018: 3).

One of the most decisive factors, influencing several art projects, was the Kerala flood during July and August 2018. Kerala experienced the most severe floods in a century and artists tried to be sensitive to the crisis and use it to reflect on major ecological problems affecting different

parts of the world. Artist Veda Thozhur Kollerri from New Delhi was residing at Pepper House during this time and created *Rigor Mortis*, a mixed-media installation out of residues of the landscape – bones, barks, barnacles, moss and grass. Bangladeshi artist, Marzia Farhana has constructed the multi-media installation *Ecocide and the Rise of Free Fall*.



Figure 17. Marzia Farhana's Multimedia Installation *Ecocide and the Rise of Free Fall* at KMB 2018

The artist collected damaged material from areas affected by the flood, including books, televisions and fans. With the objects thrown away, she is reacting to the fetishism of goods and the destruction of nature by industry. The objects hang from the ceiling in the Laboratory of Aspinwall House and move in the wind that blows in from the adjacent sea (see Fig. 18). The London based artist Temsüyanger Longkumer, who as Naga origins, visited Kochi shortly after the city opened his airport after the floods. As he could observe the resilient and capable collaborative action within the state and its population, he created *Catch a Rainbow II*. The installation placed at the courtyard Pepper House creates a rainbow through mist. It should remind on chances of hope, wonder and beauty (KBF 2018: 3). Cameroonian artist Barthelemy Toguo conceived the interactive work *Head Above Water*. The work consists of active participation by residents. He passes out pre-stamped postcards to local school students encouraging them to write about their experiences with the recent flood. In this sense, he allows the people to “exhibit the situation they found themselves in” (Dube 2018: 372). Besides

addressing current local issues through the work on-site, artists also use earlier bodies of work by linking them to the specific domestic situation. Toguio exhibited a series of woodcut prints that are created from large wood stamps sculptures – an adaption of *Urban Requiem: New World Climax* (see Fig. 19). During his stay at Pepper House for several days, he carved banners in English and Malayalam with political slogans from current political movements, which include MeToo, Save Our Sisters and Changara Land Struggle (field note, Pepper House, 16 Dec 2018).



Figure 18. *Urban Requiem: New World Climax* by Barthelemy Toguio at KMB 2018

Artist and curator for the 2020 KMB Shubigi Rao created a video-based work that revolves around the mythical world of a fictional character, S. Raoul. Raoul is a colonial officer who discovers a text that shows the trade route of book smugglers. During her several weeks' stay in Kochi, the artist recorded existing information from records in libraries, archives and daily interactions. The semi-fictional work is set in Fort Kochi with local librarians and writers as actors in the role of smugglers and their descendants. The work explores cross-cultural displacement, the dissemination of ideas, language and power systems (Dube 2018: 118). Rao's work was displayed in two rooms on the first floor of the Bungalow in Aspinwall. The first darkened room showed the video with shots of the sea, the port and the interiors of the library in Fort Kochi. In the other room with a balcony adjacent to the sea, there were tables, as can be

found in the libraries, to study books. In a way, the second room made the on-screen image tangible (field note, Aspinwall, 16 Dec 2018).

Aryakrishan, an artist who lives and works between Kochi and New Delhi, is reviving an earlier project named "Sweet Maria Monument". It is an homage to Maria, who openly identified herself as a transgender person. She was an activist as part of the queer rights movement in Kerala until she was violently murdered for what she represented. The artist recognised that no single monument could capture Maria and has therefore built a rich archive that tells of her experiences. His work should invite visitors, especially members of the queer community, to spend time in this safe place and explore the art-archive (Dube 2018: 280). Aryakrishan's exhibition room is located in a quiet corner on the first floor of the admin block in Aspinwall. I almost missed the place during my first walk through the building. Unlike the other exhibition spaces, this room is very intimate and inviting at the same time. Different objects, a flower, books and sketches lying on a table and a bed remind of a very private room. It felt almost like meeting the person Maria and her stories (field note, Aspinwall, 06 Dec 2019). My interlocutor, Sandip Luis, named this work of art as one of the exceptions to this Biennale that are genuinely critical and political. In his view, large-scale exhibitions such as the biennial cannot claim to be critical as a whole, but still, some works can reflect the curatorial idea. As Aryakrishna's work deals with queer politics in Kerala, Sandip Luis argues that the artist has taken a crucial position (Sandip Luis, 15 Jan 2019).

To be honest, I have never been very fascinated about the curatorial teams of any Biennale for that matter because it is always very vague and open-ended only. The curator can include these many artists. So it never gets this kind of critical to specify or anything like that (...) One interesting part of the large-scale exhibition is that whatever larger critic you will give, there will always be exceptions. There will be like hundreds of artists and (...) there will be like one or two interesting artists who are really politically. So, in that way, it is there in this Biennale. (...) Dube talks about marginalised communities and all that thing is there. I mean, I am more than happy to see that kind of reference she gives for these artists. (Sandip Luis, 15 Jan 2019)

The Keralan artist Dhanurdharan created an open kitchen, an art project called *Sahodharar*, which was inspired by the Keralan social reformer Sahodaran Ayyappan (1889-1968). In 1912, in Charai, Kerala, Sahodaran organised community dining events (*misrabhojanam*) addressing the caste segregation at that time. Vipin has organised this art project for visitors, artists and the KMB staff members to experience communal dining. The meals were served by experts of local cuisine as well as employees of the KMB or even visitors. The project *Sahodharar* is the result of several months, where Vipin took a walk around Fort Kochi and Mattancherry, meeting

people on the streets, talking with them about communal dining with residents, visiting their homes, sharing a meal with them and drawing portraits of the people he visited. The open kitchen at Aspinwall calls on the relict of caste discrimination that still resonates within contemporary society (Dube 2018: 90).



Figure 19. Vipin Dhanurdharan at the community kitchen, KMB 2018

Khushboo Patel pointed out the lively communal space of Vipin Dhanurdharan in the centre of Aspinwall House. During the daily public free tours through the exhibition, the art mediators invite the visitors to have a chat, grab some food and rest in the shade of the circular dining space (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019; Arun S Kumar, 09 Jan 2019).

Vipin's place (...) the open kitchen, (...) the circular dining space or the communal space (...), it's doing justice to the whole idea, which is so inclusive. There are no walls and there is nothing to cut off and it's so lively and so buzzing. I believe it's an anchor place for the entire Aspinwall House. (...) There are these different encounters and you end up meeting so many people there because a lot of people love to sit there. And constantly there are people making food there. And this whole act of sitting and eating (...) that has created a lot of dialogue for me (...). I see people from various backgrounds sitting there and talk and it's such an open and democratic place. (...) If something like that could have happened in the Pavilion itself would have been very interesting to see. (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019)

Khushboo Patel describes the *Sahodharar* as an inclusive and democratic space, which created a dialogue between people from various backgrounds.



Figure 20. Circular dining space of Vipin's Sahodharar at KMB 2018

During my walks at Aspinwall House, I could also observe, Vipin's project concerning communal dining was in several ways successful. The young staff members of the KMB, the art mediators and volunteers, were cooking, spending their breaks and having lunch at this place. Also, the visitors enjoyed the shadow around the circular stone table (see Fig. 21). Tea was served any time and you could walk in and out of the kitchen, a look at the food being prepared or help cooking. Donations financed the menu, or visitors brought vegetables. Vipin himself was on-site throughout the Biennale and worked in the kitchen (see Fig. 20). He perceives communal dining as a concept, which does not mean that everyone who came to the place was suddenly united in brotherhood. But that it still created the possibility to talk about it for a while and then to take one or the other aspect into account (field note, open kitchen, 04 Jan 2019). At this communal dining space, artists, KMB staff, visitors, and I could enter a dialogue.

6.4. The Pavilion: A Platform for Discussions

As already stated above, the Cabral Yard with the Pavilion was a central observing site for the research and built the second part of "Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life" beside the exhibition. The curator Anita Dube describes it as space "where everyone potentially can be a curator" (Dube 2018: 24). Therefore, the infrastructure, the interactions and activities observed at the venue were central to find out the importance of contemporary art concerning the process

of building a dialogue by considering the role of the audience. The infrastructure of the Pavilion and the surrounding sitting areas should underline the non-hierarchical, transparent and discursive character of the Biennale. The temporary space hosted a wide range of programming and Dube's "knowledge laboratory", which comprised workshops, talks and discussions at the Pavilion. Besides the temporal building of the Pavilion, Cabral Yard also hosted food stalls and a space for art workshops: the food stall of Edible Archive run by four women chefs serving indigenous rice and local vegetables (see Fig. 22); Café Kudumbashree run by Keralan women; and the ABC's Art Room, open to everyone and especially to children for practicing art. The entry to the areas and the Pavilion was free and accessible to everyone.



Figure 21. Edible Archives at Cabral Yard, KMB 2018

The implementation of the Pavilion space aroused divergent opinions. Some of my interlocutors criticised the architecture concerning the lack of using sustainable and local materials and techniques as well as a failure in implementing the concept of transparency and dialogue. Others emphasised its open character and possibilities for discussion. In general, the conceptualisation of the venue should reflect the curatorial theme of the Biennale - the "desire for a liberation and comradeship (away from the master and slave model) where the possibilities for a non-alienated life could spill into a 'politics of friendship'." (Dube 2018: 24). The architecture graduate student and art mediator at the KMB 2018 Khushboo Patel described the benefit of the circular

and transparent building with a closed amphitheatre inside and an outer gallery openness: “if you are an outsider and if there is a performance going on inside you can really see it from the outside so you know there's this connection between the inside and the outside, so that was the whole idea.” (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019).

Next to the Pavilion, I met the art scholar Sandip Luis for an interview and a chai at the Café Kudumbashree. The Kudumbashree Mission, the women empowerment programme of Kerala, was a key food partner of the Biennale. The food court was run by around 15 women of the mission, serving traditional Keralan food for visitors and the daily free lunch for volunteers. The art scholar Sandip Luis states that the real mechanisms and structure of the Biennale are formed through the discursive aspect, which can be found in the Pavilion. The focus changes from the aesthetic to the discursive element of the artwork. Interactions, seminars, public discussions, performances and paper presentations were taking place in the specially designed construction in the middle of the Cabral Yard (Sandip Luis, 15 Jan 2019). The transparent and open architecture of the Pavilion is pointed out by Anita Dube for several times, as it facilitates an environment for immediate encounters and activities – a possibility for a non-alienated life (field note, Let's Talk, 13 Dec 2019).

Apart from structural aspects, the Pavilion serves as an example, how the local population is engaging with the Biennale and taking part in the events. Based on several interlocutors' views and my observations, the Pavilion itself has not reached the general public. Sandip argued that the Pavilion remains a sphere of the art world:

If you look at the nature of people who participate in these discussions in the Pavilion, they come very much from the art world. (...) The general public, their participation is really less (...). If you think that the discursive platforms like this Pavilion is the defining feature of Kochi Biennale, then I think the organisations have failed to reach the public. (Sandip Luis, Jan 15, 2019)

Sandip Luis further explained, that for the general public, the Biennale is perceived more like a festival. According to Luis, people can identify more with the festival character than with the actual feature of discursivity. Luis assumed that people would not engage with the discursive aspect of artworks through interactions. Instead, they would visit the display, viewing the art objects without getting further involved in discussions.

The way the general public is perceiving the artworks and the way they're interacting with the artworks all, are still (...), how to put it, (...) really nascent stage. I think (...), like for them, it's like a festival. That kind of festival mood, you can find everywhere. (...) One crucial feature of big events, like this Biennale, like that they are very discursive. So what we see in this Biennale, in terms of the artworks and all, actually these are not the defining features of a Biennale. The real mechanisms or the real structures of the Biennale

is formed through the discursive: (...) interactions and all through seminars, public discussions, paper presentations. That discursivity is very much there. (...) So, more focus goes to the discursive aspect of the artwork. But in that way, I'm not very sure about how the general public sees the artworks as kind of a discursive object. They just come there and see the works and leave. (Sandip Luis, Jan 15 2019)

Sandip Luis thus calls into question whether the defining element of the biennial – the discursivity – is relevant to an audience, which is unfamiliar with the biennial context. Instead, the audience would be addressed by the festival character, which contrasts with the Biennale's aspiration not to present a pure spectacle. In this context, I wanted to find out how the Biennale tries to reach a regional audience, which is not familiar with the contemporary art event by addressing local specificities. In contrast to the Pavilion, the ABC Art Room and the *Sahodharar* at Aspinwall seem to have taken these more into account. And thus, they became more representative for a communal discursive and inclusive space that also addresses the local population.



Figure 22. ABC Art Room, Gond Art Workshop at KMB 2018

Compared to the Pavilion, the ABC Art Room reflects more the community aspect and the idea of sharing and of a non-hierarchical space, which is open to everyone and especially to children for practicing art. I was participating in a Workshop at ABC with the exhibiting Gond artist Mansingh Vyam. During my stay, I could observe that regular workshops were happening with school groups and children from the surrounding. One volunteer working at the art room told

me about some children from the neighbourhood joining every day (field note, workshop, 03 Jan 2019; see Fig. 23). Art mediator Patel explains that the Pavilion and Cabral Yard are enlivened through the interactive, open and accessible art room, where people participate in practice:

There is still life there in the pavilion because of the art room because there are so many workshops happening. There are kids coming in. There are you know parents are coming. (...) So that way it's very interactive because you know people are passing by and seeing what workshops are happening, what the kids are doing, (...) what the mentors are teaching (...). That portion is very interesting. But then from there (...) the whole idea kind of fizzles out. But then that [the art room] is anchoring the whole space. (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019)

Besides the ABC Art Room, the art mediators Khushboo Patel and Arun S Kumar pointed out the lively communal space of Vipin Dhanurdharan in the centre of Aspinwall House (Khushboo Patel, 11 Jan 2019; Arun S Kumar, 09 Jan 2019). Still, Arun S Kumar points out – as envisioned by Anita Dube – “The whole intention of the Pavilions is, like, the knowledge without any kind of hierarchies. Anyone can come and present their creations there. Yes, so, I hope it works out.” (Arun S Kumar, 09 Jan 2019). Consequently, in the next section, I go into more detail about performances and discussions in the Pavilion to examine what this non-hierarchical discursive space looked like in practice.

6.4.1. Let's Talk

Imagine those pushed to the margins of dominant narratives speaking: not as victims, but as futurisms' cunning and sentient sentinels. And before speaking, listening to the stone and the flowers; to older women and wise men; to the queer community; to critical voices in the mainstream; to the whispers and warnings of nature. Dube 2018: 24

The curatorial note makes clear that the issue of gender is one of the central frames in the explorations of “Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life”. In this framework, the open discussion platform was inaugurated by the performance of the American feminist artist group Guerrilla Girls at the Pavilion on the 14th December 2018. In the last 30 years, the activist group has been creating performances, posters and actions in public spaces to raise awareness for gender and ethnic inequality in the American art world and beyond. For the KMB 2018, they placed their iconic posters indoor and outdoor at the walls of Aspinwall. The poster “Don't Stereotype Me” was also adapted into the local context, translated to Malayalam, with a list of popular gender stereotypes projected on Keralan women (see Fig. 24). During their presentation at the Pavilion, the Guerrilla Girls called for intersectional activism: “Let's make the effort feminism

the effort for the future. Let's all join together with feminists on the right side of history” and encouraged the audience to stand up and use art as a vehicle for that (field note, Let's Talk, 14 Dec 2020).



Figure 23. *Don't Stereotype Me!* by Guerrilla Girls at Aspinwall

The topicality of feminist issues was made evident also by the political events which accompanied the Biennale. October 2018, Riyas Komu, the Co-founder of the Biennale stepped back from his position after he was accused for sexual harassment, made public by the Instagram account *herdsceneand*, which gives a platform for women to share anonymously instances of sexual harassment in the Indian art world. On 13th December 2018 – the second day of the KMB opening week – *herdsceneand* shared MeToo allegations against Subodh Gupta, a well-known artist, curator and Silver Patron of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. On the same day, I was conducting my first interview with exhibiting artist Chandan Gomes, a 31-year-old photographer from Delhi. We were sitting in the yard of Aspinwall in the shadow of a Neem tree, as Gomes's exhibition space was lacking a ventilator. A friend of Gomes passed by and informed us about the gathering of the Indian art community at Vasco de Gama Square Fort Kochi, happening later in the evening. Around 60 artists and art scholars were discussing a reaction to the assaults, as an official response by the Biennale was still missing (Chandan Gomes, Dec 13, 2018). It resulted in a public statement during the already mentioned performance of the Guerrilla Girls on the third day of the Biennale's opening week. Rosalyn D'Mello art critic and the author of *A Handbook for My Lover* (2015) stepped forward to

address the Biennale Foundation and other cultural institutions to support the investigation of Riyas Komu's and Subodh Gupta's allegations and to protect the survivors, who have come forward to testimony. The statement consisted of various challenging questions to the audience and especially to the KMB: "Is the investigation of Riyas Komu's allegations on the way or what is the timeline? Will the investigating body at KMB⁸ and other cultural institutions take measures to protect the anonymity and safety of the survivors who have come forward to testimony?". D'Mello approached the audience, which supports their claims, to stand up. In the end, the whole crowd was standing. The group of around 60 artists and cultural practitioners made their statement to "enrich solidarity through extra-institutional conversation that takes place as a community." (field note, Let's Talk, Dec 14, 2018).



Figure 24. Let's Talk Guerrilla Girls at the Pavilion

With this statement, they also captured Anita Dube's vision for the Biennale to create a space of "the warm solidarities of community" (Dube 2018: 24). Anita Dube made a final comment on the performance and the following discussion: "We inaugurated the space as an intersectional space (...). This place can also be a space of insurrection (...) Thank you, Rosalyn

⁸ The Kochi Biennale Foundation established a Internal Complaints Committee (ICC): "Under the guidelines put forth by the Central Government of India for the safety of women and prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, Kochi Biennale Foundation has a constituted Internal Complaints Committee for reporting any grievances with full privacy." (URL 17)

(...) It is a place for discussions. We should use it to break down and discuss many of these things.” (ibid.). The curator highlighted that the Pavilion is an intersectional space and a space of insurrection (ibid.).

Parul Dave-Mukherji criticised the performance and work of the Guerrilla Girls. She argued that their new work for the biennial is still placed in the North American context and that during their presentation, they lacked regional context knowledge about India (Parul Dave-Mukherji, Jan 29, 2019).

I understand why certain iconic figures from Western feminism were invited. They were given a centre stage like Guerrilla Girls. So, that may be an interesting decision. But I had expected her to create a dialogue between Indian feminism and what was happening there (...) for me this whole idea seems as if it's very one-sided. (Parul Dave-Mukherji, 29 Jan 2019)

I could observe during the Guerrilla Girl's lecture that they gave a presentation of their projects and actions which focus on gender income gaps and the lack of diversity of women of colour in North American museums and galleries. When it came to the speech about the MeToo incidents by the Indian artists, the two Guerrilla Girls seemed surprised, not prepared for it and not informed about the reality of Indian female artists (field note, Let's Talk, Dec 14, 2018). Both of my interlocutors, Sandip Luis and Parul Dave-Mukherji, have expected a reaction or statement from Anita Dube in this regard. Furthermore, they noticed that the curator did not react critically to the Sabarimala temple protests and that as a consequence, there was no discussion about it taking place at the Biennale (Sandip Luis, 15 Jan 2019/ Parul Dave-Mukherji 29 Jan 2019). Sandip Luis notes that one of the central curatorial themes represented by feminist and queer women, “sticks to the art world public. That feminist tone doesn't enter the public imagination.” (Sandip Luis, 15 Jan 2019).

According to my observations, the performance of the Guerrilla Girls remained one of the most visited and prominent events of the Biennale. This is partly because in the opening week (12 December to 18 December) most of the events were planned as part of a unique program for these days and most of the exhibiting artists, as well as journalists and a broad biennial audience, were present. During the first week program, there were several talks with artists, among others, with Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh, who documented the LGBTQ communities in their photographs and videos. Sunil Gupta talked about his work, which is influenced by his personal experiences as an activist and gay HIV positive man in India and the UK (field note, let's talk, 16 Dec 2018).

On the last day of the opening week, the International Biennial Association Conference was taking place, with curators and co-founders from various biennials to present their biennial formats. Different biennial professionals from around the globe were present during the first week and used the Pavilion as a platform to share and discuss current potentials and developments of the biennials. One of these was *The Atlantic Project*, a pilot project for a new international festival of contemporary art, whose first interventions (September and October 2018) took place in the public space of Plymouth, UK. Another biennial that was presented was *Bamako Encounters*, which is held every two years in Mali since 1994, to promote contemporary art and photography trends in Africa. The conference was only sparsely visited, as it seemed to be only of interest for biennial practitioners. It shows the full range of the biennials spread all over the world and collaborating in the framework of the International Biennial Association founded in 2012, of which co-founder of the Kochi Biennial Bose Krishnamachari is also part (field note, IBA conference, Dec 17, 2018).

Whereas the afternoon “Let’s Talk” sessions featuring art professionals were less attended, during evenings with concerts and film screenings, more local people gathered in the Pavilion, including many young people, and the volunteers who supervised the exhibitions during the day. The Biennale’s film program, titled “Artists’ Cinema”, showed a film series curated by various artists almost every evening. There were international and national contributions, e.g., a short film showing the everyday life of children in Kashmir, “Kul Gov Garem” by Arif Mir. “Music of Muziris” featured regular weekend performances by regional musicians as well as international groups, such as the intercultural Australian/Indian music collaboration “Three Seas Project”. During concerts, the Pavilion was fully occupied (field note, 18 Dec 2018).

The Pavilion provided a stage for artists, musicians, scientists and visitors to share their thoughts and ideas. Through concerts and movie screenings, the space gained a kind of festive character. Participants and visitors of the Biennale, as well as people from the neighbourhood came together, shared a drink, danced and celebrated – in the spirit of the curator’s vision: “Where pleasure and pedagogy could sit together and share a drink, and where we could dance and sing and celebrate a dream together.” (Dube 2018: 24).

7. Discussion

‘Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life’ asks and searches for questions in the hope of dialogue.

Anita Dube 2018

An initial objective of this research was to investigate the biennial format in the specific regional context of Kochi. *How is this globally proliferated format practiced in the regional context of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry?* In this respect, the development of the Indian biennial was introduced by publications on the Kochi Biennale and Indian art (Chapter 5). Based on the collected data, the influence of the biennial on the city, and vice versa was examined (Chapter 5.2.). As shown by the art historian Partha Mitter, India’s contemporary scene includes tribal art, women’s art and the arts of everyday use produced by artisans, which was formerly hidden in art history. Indian art scholars Manghani, Kapur and Mitter emphasised the fact that India, as a site of contemporary art, can make a difference. In the same way, it makes a difference as a site of critique and resistance challenging former restrictions imposed by North America and Europe (see Chapter 5.1.). In this regard, it should be highlighted again the note of Mitter saying “the most visible and critical presence has been that of woman artists and art critics, and perhaps in them lies the future development of Indian art.” (Mitter 2001: 239). Placing the Indian art biennial in Kochi already shows in some respects a criticism or challenge of existing structures. Since the Biennale was located outside the centres of contemporary art in a “more independent and alternative space for art while suddenly giving Kochi a national and international focus through art.” (D’Souza 2016: 31f). Against this background, it could be argued that the 4th exhibition of the KMB, creates a more independent, alternative and critical space for art in several ways.

The position of the curator has been discussed in the chapter "The Curator’s Story". As mentioned in section two, through the selection and interpretation of artists, artworks and forms of display, most curators want to tell a specific story, which may be informed by their practices and discourses. In terms of the discursive exhibition model, curators should act as mediators, add meaning and value to art and become the primary agents of critique and debate around contemporary art (see Chapter 4.3.). As stated by Anita, the curatorial frame of the exhibition is about deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge. In this sense, she also tried to deconstruct her position of power as a curator, replacing her authority through the platform of the Pavilion, where everyone can share his knowledge and potentially become a curator.

Cultural scientist Papastergiadis and Martin argue that the former function of the curator - to deliver an interpretation and categorisation of the global pathways of contemporary art – has changed through “platforms”:

As the city and the biennale are reconfigured as platforms from which viewers can ‘launch themselves’, we can see how the traditional function of the curator (...) has been complemented by the task of inviting artists and collectives who activate a critical interface between local citizens and global processes or (...) who use the biennale as a ‘space of encounter’. (Papastergiadis/Martin 2011: 47)

Anita Dube also envisioned the Biennale as a “space of encounter” with the Pavilion as the main platform for interaction. The Pavilion was to function as what Dube called a “knowledge laboratory”.

Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life was curated by a woman and critic, including contemporary forms of tribal art and traditional arts and craft, as well as a strong focus on women artists. The inclusion of art forms, voices and stories which were formerly hidden from history, reflects to a certain extent the Indian biennial as a site of critique and resistance. Moreover, the Biennale venues do not represent “white cubes” but are located in former colonial warehouses transformed into art spaces, which tell of historical and socio-political processes in the region.

The exhibition venues and infrastructure have been examined in the second chapter of the empirical part. Infrastructures are designed to facilitate the circulation of objects, peoples and ideas. Bakke and Peterson argue, “though generally overlooked until they break, infrastructures provide rich material for anthropological projects that, in aspiring to reveal things taken for granted, make apparent the material process that move art and its audience.” (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 275). The analysis of infrastructure is essential to study art exhibitions from an anthropological perspective. An anthropological study considers the broader social field of art, in which forms and sounds are produced, experienced, circulated and given meaning. Infrastructure includes not only the built form but also institutions and networks, which facilitate the circulation and presentation of people, resources, capitals and the arts. Despite their omnipresence, infrastructure facilities are constructed in such a way that their presence and the circulation they create are naturalised (Bakke/Peterson 2017: 275). The examination of exhibition spaces and the “Biennale city” gave insight into the question - *How are site-specificity and local particularities constitutive for the KMB 2018?*

The renovation and maintenance of the buildings and infrastructure through the Biennial, sponsors and state subsidies, contributes to a unique ambience that makes the place even more

attractive for tourists and at the same time, creates new spaces for art education and production. On the one hand, new galleries, homestays are opening, and streets are improved. On the other hand, there are art-residencies and collaborations between international and regional artists taking place, such as at Pepper House, and new art institutions that promote engagement with art in the community, like URU Art Harbour at TKM Warehouse (see Chapter 6.2.1.).

Concerning my collected data on the infrastructure of the Biennale and its impact on the city, I can argue that the Kochi Muziris Biennale has created alternative spaces for contemporary art in Kochi. Since collaborations of regional, national and international artists emerge in the context of art residencies and site-specific art projects. Away from the galleries and museums in Mumbai or Delhi, the KMB allows Indian artists to meet international and regional artists. Beyond that, a broader audience can engage with their art projects. Such as my interlocutor and exhibiting artist Chandan Gomes told me in the very beginning of my research: Compared to his exhibitions at niche galleries in New Delhi, at the Biennale he “gets an audience beyond the artwork”, such as a school group that “bring us different agency to the work or a different kind of discourse” (Chandan Gomes, 13 Dec 2018). For participants of the Biennale, including artists, staff members, art mediators, volunteers, visitors, the event enables a greater audience and such a more meaningful discourse about art and an exchange of ideas.

In contrary to the galleries and art museums of Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore, the ten venues spread all over the city of Fort Kochi in old buildings and warehouses created fewer hierarchies. The Biennale engaged with the city through site-specific art such as posters and graffiti on the streets. Art galleries, art residencies and cafés were transforming the city into a small art hub. The creative economy helps to preserve the old heritage buildings and attracts tourists. School and student groups from the local regions and especially middle-class people from all over Kerala, were visiting the Biennale. Most are not familiar with contemporary art but are used to the rich festival culture. Around 150 young women and men were from the region were working as volunteers at the Biennale sites.

Beyond the participants and visitors of the Biennale, the question remains open, how far the local population can establish a connection to the contemporary art exhibition. Still, the Biennale now exists in Fort Kochi. It could be said that residents identify with the Biennale, as it is a large-scale event, which shapes the city during its course and beyond. The slogan “It’s Our Biennale” could be misunderstood as a bottom-up event. Rather, it reflects the curatorial approach and the Foundation’s aim to promote the Biennale as a local and communal engagement.

Local particularities and a discursive platform are the main features of new biennials and discursive exhibitions. The format of the biennial provides new possibilities towards exhibiting contemporary art: discussion platforms, inclusive exhibitions, new conceptions of art through regional particularities and global connections. The 4th edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale was examined in the context of these new typologies of discursive exhibition-making. In this respect, I wanted to find out: *How does the discursive biennial format facilitate critical discourse through contemporary art and exhibition-making?*

The central aspect and social concern of “Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life” were to enrich the solidarity of the community and to create dialogue. Contrary to event culture and the spectacle, the experience of and through artworks should evoke a self-determined audience. The Pavilion, the discursive platform of the KMB, should enable a place for discussions, insurrections and performing art without hierarchies (see Chapter 6.4.). The ABC’s Art Room and the Communal Dining seemed to do more justice to the idea of an inclusive and discursive space than the Pavilion. The Art Room organised by Joseph Blaise – an art pedagogic working with small communities in Kerala – and the *Sahodharar* by Vipin Dhanurdharan – a self-made artist travelling through Kerala collecting traditional recipes from local farmers and portraying them – evoked visitors to practice art, to discuss, to exchange knowledge or to eat together (see Chapter 6.3.2.). Those places served the idea of dialogue and community in contrast to the Pavilion designed by Delhi based anagram architects, which was criticised by some interlocutors for addressing only participants of the art world, for being too exclusive and unsustainable. At the Pavilion, professionals, scholars and international artists were invited on stage. In contrast, the art room and the communal dining allowed for the creation of more interactive and inclusive space.

The exhibition of the KMB 2018 could be described as inclusive in terms of the high percentage of participating female artists and young and unknown artists from South-East Asia. The topicality of embroidery and weaving challenged the boundaries between traditional art forms and fine art. It brings into focus untold stories of marginalised groups practicing those art forms. *The Loom*, an ethnographic documentary of Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar, for example, sheds light on the mill working class of Mumbai (see Chapter 6.3.1.). Their approach as social scientists and filmmakers also shows the interdisciplinarity of discursive exhibitions. Photography, video and multimedia installation formed a major part of the 4th KMB edition. New media questions dichotomies between popular culture and art, as well as between centre and periphery, and make art more accessible. Interactive installations such as Afrah Shafiq’s

Enter Sultana's Reality create immersive spaces, where the visitor is welcome to engage with the artwork through simple instructions (see Chapter 6.3.1.). Such spaces democratise art in contrast to overpowering white box galleries or museums.

“Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life” created a space for inclusion and visibility of former marginalised art practices and artists. The 4th edition evoked discussions at different discursive platforms, especially at the communal projects of the art room and the communal dining. The conception of art was broadened by showing traditional art forms and new media art, challenging strict definitions of what is art.

However, the critical discourse was limited at the Biennale. Some of my interlocutors hoped for more reactions to current socio-political events, such as the strikes around the Sarimbala Temple verdict and the MeToo debate in the Indian art scene. Others do not believe in a critical range of this event, since on the one hand, they think that the general public does not understand the critical issues addressed in the art projects and discussions remain within the world of art professionals. On the other hand, the Biennale as a large-scale event is perceived to cover only superficially different socio-political topics. It has not the potential to make a difference or change. So the question remains open, how far the critical discourse within the Biennale has an effect beyond the art world. I would assume that theoretically, the strive for critical perspectives was there at the KMB 2018/19, which is reflected in the curatorial note, the interpretations of exhibited art projects and in some discussions at the Pavilion. What impact these perspectives have in practice, on the contemporary art scene, on the notion of contemporary art, on local artists, on the public, will only become more visible in the future and the further course of the still quite young Biennale. For now, I would argue that the KMB has created a new space for artistic exchange and has placed Kochi as “Biennale City” on the world map of contemporary art.

8. Conclusion

This master thesis entitled "Hope for Dialogue: Discursive Exhibition-Making at Kochi Muziris Biennale 2018/19" set out to examine the phenomenon of the globally proliferated biennial format in a specific regional context. Based on the results of my two-month-long ethnographic fieldwork at the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2018/2018 and theoretical discourses around contemporary art biennials, the present research aimed to investigate local particularities, site-specifies as well as the curatorial approach of inclusive and discursive exhibition-making.

The ethnographic field research allowed me to gain comprehensive insights into activities, interactions, spaces, discourses, regional contexts and ideas around the Biennale in Kochi. At the same time, the large-scale international exhibition overwhelmed me with a large number of artists, employees, events, tourists, and various collateral and other cultural events running alongside. The collected data shows on a micro-scale the manifold and complex discourses, processes and ideas, which circulate in the Biennale, influenced by regional and global connections. Conversations and observations conducted on-site are based on my personal selection limited by the availability of my interview partners. The analysis includes my subjective view on the art event and its participants, representing a small excerpt of a mega event. I attempted to show the personal experiences of my interview partners and myself as a researcher to facilitate a more in-depth approach to the subject. To the same extent, I dealt with theories and discourses of the anthropology of art, global art studies and the proliferation of the biennial, attempting to embed my findings into a broader picture and to contribute to the debate about contemporary art biennials.

In the second chapter, I theoretically approached art and exhibition-making, drawing on anthropological perspectives on art. The conception of art is influenced by changing notions throughout history, which partly persist until today. Those altering notions have been discussed to reflect on hegemonies within the academic debate on art critically. At the same time, it has been shown that anthropological research on art is influenced by art history and theory. Thus, the anthropology of art represents an interdisciplinary field. It was highlighted that art should be viewed in its social context and that the very category of art is blurred. Therefore, anthropological research does not strive to give a closed definition of art. Rather, it wants to understand the meaning of art, considering the specificities of engagement with art and the social formations around it. Hence, an art event like the biennial can broaden the understanding of how and why art is essential as a social process (Gell 1998; Morhpy/Perkins 2006; Bakke/Peterson 2017). In this regard, it has also been emphasised that art exhibitions are never

neutral spatial arrangements and are shaped by specific intentions of curators to move the audience in a certain way (Svasek 2007). That is why an examination of exhibition-making practices can shed light on dominant discourses within the contemporary art worlds.

In the third chapter, I focused on contemporary art worlds in the context of global processes referring to global art studies. It was pointed out that contemporary art is an element of processes of globalisation, which have increasingly pluralised contemporary art worlds. A “globalising perspective” on contemporary art pays attention to the plurality of interconnected worlds and multiple identities creating art, which have become constitutive for contemporary art. The notion of contemporary art is not about limiting definitions, but more about the social, cultural and global processes constituting global art worlds. In this sense, I discussed the recent concept of “global art” (Belting et al. 2013), which attempts to abolish former dualisms between high and low art, avantgarde and popular art, between art history and ethnology. Within the newly emerging art worlds, the local and the regional is reevaluated. Traditional and local art practices became a driving force behind art production, which is more and more considered as cultural production. Engagements with local particularities and public spaces in the context of immersive and performative art practices seem to offer new and critical perspectives and to democratise art. Those practices can be found in various biennials staged all over the globe. In this thesis, the proliferation of biennials was approached as a field of study to reflect on contemporary art practices and the modes of displaying artworks, which are created in diverse regional and global contexts.

In Chapter Four, I examined the nature of the biennial phenomenon and the new typologies of discursive exhibition practice by discussing discourses on the biennale format. It has been argued that the proliferation of the biennial reflects the changes in the global art world, which is no longer dominated by Western narratives, but rather responses to local particularities and enforces spaces and platforms for discourse. In connection with the global art concept, I would conclude that the biennial format is a primary vehicle for the promotion, distribution and production of knowledge around contemporary art. Compared to museums or galleries, the biennial model offers more experimental spaces for new discourses and critical perspectives. Away from global contemporary art centres and practiced in regional and local contexts, biennials have the potential to remove the cultural distance between centre and periphery and to create room for diverse regional art practices and themes. During the Biennial Conference in 2009, biennial professionals contributed to rethink the traditional biennial format and to develop new typologies of displaying (Filipovic et al. 2010). Based on those contributions, I identified

several modes of discursive exhibition-making: Site-specificity and a focus on local particularities; platforms for discussion; self-determination of the audience; critical self-reflexive curatorship; and knowledge production around contemporary art. These practices should counteract the mere spectacle by enforcing critical dialogue and engaging a more general audience. The discussed modes of exhibition-making also form the basis for the typologies I used to examine the display of the KMB and how it engages with discursive practices.

In Chapter Five, I consulted the academic publication on the Kochi Biennale “India’s Biennale Effect”, which reflects the knowledge produced about the event and at the same time, brings the Kochi Muziris Biennale into the scholarly debate about biennials (D’Souza/Manghani 2016). Based on this contribution, I elucidated the emergence of the Biennale in India. For a general overview, I have outlined Partha Mitter’s essay on the Indian contemporary scene, which is part of his Indian history. It became clear that the contemporary art scene is influenced by its demarcation to Western art history and politicisation of art through postcolonial writings and the women’s movement. As has been stated in this chapter, the main counter-narrative of India’s contemporary scene to Western art is: Contemporary art stands in the tradition of resistance and has the potential to make a difference (Mitter 2001; Kapur 2000; Manghani 2016). The development of the Kochi Muziris Biennale is also seen in this light. Still, one must consider that such a cultural space can never be autonomous or public, even if there is a strong demand for artistic freedom. The Kochi Biennale is supported by private as well as federal funds (Tato 2016).

By launching the Biennale in the periphery of India, away from metropolitan art centres, the event already seems to counteract the existing structures of established art networks in India. In this context, it was shown that the Biennale was also made possible by the previous participation of Indian artists at other biennials. So, I would conclude that the Biennale poses an alternative forum to India’s art hubs. At the same time, it is embedded in the global biennial network and its discourse, which envisions biennials as places of critique, difference and resistance. Before I presented my field study on the fourth edition, I outlined the particularity of the Kochi Biennial in general, based on the main statements of the Kochi Biennale Foundation and the co-founder Bose Krishnamachari. The Biennale is conceived as a “People’s Biennale” and identifies strongly with the city of Kochi. Krishnamachari’s statement, “We did not choose Fort Kochi; Fort Kochi chose itself for the biennale.” gets to the heart of the KMB’s conception.

In the sixth chapter, I presented the findings of my empirical research at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018/19. The aim of the case study was an in-depth investigation of discursive exhibition practices with a focus on site-specificity and local particularities. Anita Dube, the curator of the fourth edition, envisioned the Biennale as a place of possibilities for a non-alienated life, asking and searching for questions in the hope of dialogue. To create a space of solidarity, community, differences, and sharing, she constructed an exhibition with voices from the margins and a discursive platform of the Pavilion – a knowledge laboratory without hierarchies. Based on my interviews and observations, I examined how Dube’s curatorial vision was put into practice. I discussed the exhibition infrastructure illustrating the “Biennale city” of Kochi, which is shaped by reused heritage buildings and its charming village-like character. In this context, the exhibition is counteracting the white cube of galleries or museums. I further assume that it is more accessible to the general public in Kerala, compared to the contemporary art hubs of Mumbai or Delhi.

I depicted art projects reflecting on local particularities and critical perspectives. Thereby I explored two aspects more in detail: The artistic practice of weaving as well as site-specific engagement. The different techniques and exploration of the more traditional practice of weaving brought a focus on women in terms of gender and a critical perspective on an industry displaced by capitalism in terms of socioeconomic issues. I would further argue that the exhibited textile art expands the conception of contemporary art by combining the traditional art of weaving and local practices and responding to contemporaneity. In my opinion, concluding from the site-specific projects, communal dining reflects a successful engagement with local contexts. It is a critique of the caste system and, at the same time, a place for encounters at the Biennale.

Finally, I observed the discursive platform of the Pavilion, including the example of the performance by the feminist art activist group Guerrilla Girls, which culminated in a statement around MeToo allegations in the Indian art world. Regarding the Pavilion, it is difficult to say how much of a non-hierarchical space has been created here. While the artistic discussions probably remain in the sphere of the art world, the concerts at the Pavilion had a festival character, where not least the hierarchies on a spatial level disappeared when the chairs were moved to the side and everyone danced on one level, on one floor.

This thesis only represents a small case study, which gives a more in-depth insight into the contemporary phenomenon of the biennial. The research findings and analysis are based on a limited number of events and interview partners providing comprehensive perspectives on the

large-scale exhibition within the specific context of the fourth edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The case study has shown site-specific and local characteristics of the implementation of the discursive biennial format: Starting with the curator, who identifies herself with the radical left-wing movement of Keralan artists; on-site art projects that refer to local contexts and interact with the local population like *Sahodharar*; exhibited textile artworks that focus on a traditional and regional art form and female artists; a platform that strived to be non-hierarchical and became a venue with a festival character during evening events. All in all, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale shows the main characteristics of a discursive biennial format, which have emerged in the global network of biennial professionals and reflects the diversity and local differences in the implementation of the event.

With an anthropological approach, this thesis considers local particularities within heterogeneous lifeworlds. I attempted to contribute to the global art studies and the debate about biennials by expanding the context of contemporary art and blurring fixed conceptions of art and culture. Further ethnographic field research on art biennials can provide a broader understanding of regional contexts, differences and changes within globalised (art) worlds.

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Figures

Fig. 1: Coley, N. (2018). *A Place Beyond Belief*, Illuminated text on scaffolding, Dimensions variable, Installation, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Courtesy: Studio Nathan Coley, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

Fig. 2: Mäusl, S. (2020). Artist's Profiles of the 4th KMB Edition, numbers have been derived from the KMB Short Guide 2018.

Fig. 3: Gomes, C. (2017). *Untitled*, Photography, Courtesy: Chandan Gomes, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

Fig. 4: KMB (2018). *Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life: Map*, Fort Kochi, India: Kochi Biennale Foundation.

Fig. 5: Nandy, A. (2000). Time Travel to a Possible Self: Searching for the Alternative Cosmopolitanism of Cochin. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 295-327.

Fig. 6: KBF (2018). It's my/ It's Our Biennale, Kochi Biennale Foundation, Fort Kochi, India, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

Fig. 7: Dube, A. (2018). Possibilities for A Non-Alienated Life, Aspinwall House, Fort Kochi, India, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

Fig. 8: KMB (2018). Anand Warehouse, Cabral Yard, MAP Project, Aspinwall House, Fort Kochi, India, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

Fig. 9: Café at Pepperhouse, KMB 2018, Fort Kochi, India, Photo: Sophie Mäusl

- Fig. 10: Anagram Architects (2018). Koodaaram : The Pavilion for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018-19, Fort Kochi, India. Retrieved from <https://anagramarchitects.com/?portfolio=koodaaram-the-pavilion-for-the-kochi-muziris-biennale-2018>
- Fig. 11: Vyam, D. & Vyam S. (2018). *Dus Motin Kanya Aur Jal Devata*, Acrylic paint on plywood panel, Courtesy: Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 12: Arunkumar HG. (2018). *CON-struction I*, Reclaimed packaging wood from an industrial scrap yard, recycled paper pulp, cement, wood glue etc., Courtesy: Arunkumar HG, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 13&14: Das, B. (2018). *Missing Route*, Hand-stitched embroidery, Courtesy: Bapi Das and Kalakriti Art Gallery, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 15: Candiani, T. (2018). *String Loom*, Sound installation, Courtesy: Tania Candiani and Galeria Vermelho, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 16: Santha KV (2018). Outdoor installation at KMB 2018, Hand woven fabric, Courtesy: Tasara – Centre for Creative Weaving, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 17: Farhana, M. (2018). *Ecocide and the Rise of Free Fall*, Multimedia Installation, Household materials, furniture, books, valuable things damaged or destroyed in Kerala floods, Courtesy: Marzia Farhana, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 18: Togu, B. (2018). *Urban Requiem: New World Climax*, Mixed media installation, Steel ladders, wooden stamps, wood block prints, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 19 & 20: Dhanurdharan, V. (2018). *Sahodaran*, art project at Aspinwall, KMB 2018, Photo: Courtesy Biennale Foundation.
- Fig. 21: *Edible Archives* at Cabral Yard, KMB 2018, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 22: ABC Art Room by Joseph Blaise at Cabral Yard, KMB 2018, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 23: Guerrilla Girls (2018). *Don't Stereotype Me!*, Courtesy: Guerrilla Girls, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.
- Fig. 24: Let's Talk with Guerrilla Girls at KMB 2018, Fort Kochi, India, Photo: Sophie Mäusl.

List of Interviews

Personal Interview with Chandan Gomes, Dec 13, 2018

Personal Interview with Bapi Das, Dec 13, 2018

Personal Interview with Arunkumar HG, Dec 14, 2018

Personal Interview with Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Dec 14, 2018

Personal Interview with Anjali Monteiro and K P Jayasankar, Dec 14, 2018

Personal Interview with Vicky Roy, Dec 15, 2018

Personal Interview with Afrah Shafiq, Dec 16, 2018

Personal Interview with Mochu, Dec 17, 2018

Personal Interview with Anushka Rajendran, Dec 23, 2018

Personal Interview with Chandran TV, Dec 31, 2018

Personal Interview with Arun S Kumar, Jan 09, 2019

Personal Interview with Khushboo Patel, Jan 11, 2019

Informal Talk with two KMB staff members, Jan 13, 2019

Personal Interview with Sandip Luis, Jan 15, 2019

Personal Interview with Kaushik Bhaumik, Jan 29, 2019

Personal Interview with Parul Dave-Mukherji, Jan 29, 2019

List of Field Notes

Field note, KMB Opening, Dec 12, 2018

Field note, Let's Talk "Deconstructing the Curatorial Frame", Dec 13, 2018

Field note, Let's Talk "Guerrilla Girls", Dec 14, 2018

Field note, Let's Talk "Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh", Dec 16, 2018

Field note, Infrastructure Aspinwall House, Cabral Yard, Pepper House, Dec 16, 2018

Field note, Infrastructure Kashi Town House, Kashi Art Café, Dec 17, 2018

Field note, International Biennale Conference, Dec 17, 2018

Field note, Infrastructure MAP Project Space, Dec 18, 2018

Field note, Chris Dercon Artist Cinema, Dec 18, 2018

Field note, Music of Muziris “Insurrections Ensemble”, Dec 18, 2018

Field note, Strike Sabarimala, Jan 02, 2019

Field note, Workshop “Gond Art and Storytelling”, Jan 03, 2019

Field note, Free Guided Tour with Arun, Jan 04, 2019

Field note, Open Kitchen, Jan 04, 2019

Field note, Music of Muziris “Allrounds”, Jan 04, 2019

Field note, Infrastructure David Hall, Jan 09, 2019

Field note, Let’s Talk “Vijay Prashad and Sudhanva Deshpande: Art and Politics”, Jan 10, 2019

Field note, Infrastructure TKM Warehouse, Jan 12, 2019

Field note, Let’s Talk “Ramachandra Guha: 8 Threats to the Freedom of Expression”, Jan 12, 2019

Field note, Infrastructure Anand Warehouse, Jan 14, 2019

Field note, Infrastructure Durbar Hall, Jan 15, 2019

Appendix

Abstract (English)

Between 12th December 2018 and 29th March 2019, the fourth *Kochi-Muziris Biennale* was taking place in Kochi, a major port city in the state of Kerala in the Southwest of India. Anita Dube – the curator of the edition called *Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life* – envisioned the contemporary art display as an inclusive and discursive space. At the discussion platform of the *Pavilion*, exhibiting artists and visitors could share their knowledge and ideas. The focus of the exhibition was on voices from marginalized groups. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is the biggest biennial in South-East Asia and an outstanding example of the proliferation of the large-scale international exhibition format. Biennials are one of the most striking phenomena in the contemporary global culture and create dominant discourses around contemporary art today. Currently, biennials are focussing on the so-called *discursive exhibition*, promising a platform for discussions, a more inclusive approach and self-determination for the audience. Besides some academic contributions (Bydler 2004; Altshuler 2013; Weiss 2011; Clark 1998; Green and Gardener 2016; Fillitz 2016; Filipovic et al. 2010), there has been a lack of scholarly examinations of the biennial phenomena. In contrast, other aspects of global processes and cultural production have long been part of in-depth research in the social sciences.

Based on empirical data collected during a two-month ethnographic field research at the Kochi-Muziris-Biennale (KMB) 2018/19, this master thesis aims to answer the following research questions: How is this globally proliferated format practiced in a regional context? How are site-specificities, local particularities and discursive exhibition-making constitutive for the KMB 2018? The conceptual framework of the present thesis constitutes the anthropology of art, especially theoretical debates on global art, contemporary art biennials and exhibition-making. Biennials, not least as a field of study, are very interdisciplinary. Therefore, this paper is not limited to anthropological theories. Instead, it focusses on various discourses about the biennial phenomenon.

Abstract (German)

Zwischen dem 12. Dezember 2018 und dem 29. März 2019 fand die vierte *Kochi-Muziris Biennale* in Kochi, einer großen Hafenstadt im Bundesstaat Kerala im Südwesten Indiens, statt. Die zeitgenössische Kunstaussstellung mit dem Titel *Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life* wurde von der indischen Künstlerin Anita Dube als inklusiver und diskursiver Ort konzipiert. Mit einer Plattform – dem *Pavilion* – sollte Raum für Ideen und Diskussionen zwischen KünstlerInnen und BesucherInnen geschaffen werden. Im Zentrum der Ausstellung standen Stimmen marginalisierter Gruppen. Die Kochi-Muziris Biennale ist die größte Biennale in Südostasien und spiegelt die globale Verbreitung von internationalen Kunstaussstellungen wider. Biennalen sind eines der auffälligsten Phänomene in der zeitgenössischen globalen Kultur und schaffen dominante Diskurse über zeitgenössische Kunst. Aktuell entstehen im Rahmen von Biennalen immer mehr *discursive exhibitions*, die eine Plattform für Diskussionen, einen inklusiveren Ansatz und mehr Selbstbestimmung für das Publikum versprechen. Neben einigen kritischen Analysen (Bydler 2004; Altshuler 2013; Weiss 2011; Clark 1998; Green and Gardener 2016; Fillitz 2016; Filipovic et al. 2010) fehlt es an wissenschaftlichen und theoretischen Untersuchungen zum Phänomen der Biennale, während andere Aspekte globaler und kultureller Prozesse seit langem Gegenstand sozialwissenschaftlicher Forschung sind. Die vorliegende Masterarbeit stützt sich auf empirische Daten, die während einer zweimonatigen ethnographischen Feldforschung auf der Kochi-Muziris-Biennale (KMB) 2018/19 erhoben wurden und versucht folgende Fragen zu beantworten: Wie wird das global verbreitete Ausstellungsformat der Biennale in einem regionalen Kontext umgesetzt? Welche Rolle spielen dabei Ortsspezifität, lokale Besonderheiten und diskursive Ausstellungsmethoden? Den konzeptionellen Rahmen der vorliegenden Arbeit bildet die Anthropologie der Kunst, insbesondere theoretische Debatten zu *global art*, zeitgenössischen Kunstbiennalen und deren Ausstellungspraktiken. Biennalen sind nicht zuletzt als Forschungsfeld stark interdisziplinär ausgerichtet. Daher beschränkt sich die vorliegende Arbeit nicht auf anthropologische Theorien, sondern konzentriert sich auf verschiedene Diskurse über das Phänomen der Biennale.