

# 21ª BIENAL DE ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA SESC\_VIDEOBRASIL

 Sesc

 ASSOCIAÇÃO  
CULTURAL  
VIDEOBRASIL

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# ERIN COATES

Albany, Austrália, 1977  
Vive em Perth, Austrália

Albany, Australia, 1977  
Lives in Perth, Australia

Erin Coates desenvolveu um interesse particular pela relação entre a visão cinematográfica e o movimento visual produzido a partir de um carro em movimento. Em um trabalho anterior, *Driving to the Centre of the Earth* [Dirigindo rumo ao centro da Terra], de 2012, Coates apresenta a imagem de um automóvel avançando através de um túnel (cujo interior remete a cavidades orgânicas e corporais), em direção ao centro do planeta. Neste novo trabalho, *Driving to the Ends of the Earth* [Dirigindo rumo ao fim do mundo], a artista, acompanhada de seu cachorro, dirige em meio a explosões, demolições, incêndios e inundações. A visão da câmera salta constantemente entre a parte traseira e dianteira do carro, observando, através dos vidros, uma destruição global que não parece afetar os ocupantes. O carro em que viajam está repleto de mantimentos de sobrevivência e, em vários momentos, Coates realiza ações banais, como limpar o interior do veículo e exercitar os músculos da mão.

A obra também explora de que maneira os canais de notícias e as plataformas digitais, como o YouTube, transformaram as formas de que dispomos para nos relacionar com as imagens de desastres e catástrofes, que podem ser capturadas, vistas e reproduzidas inúmeras vezes e em lugares diversos. À maneira de um *road movie*, Coates apresenta o carro como espaço de proteção e segurança diante das calamidades que ocorrem em todos os cenários pelos quais se desloca. Isso também pode ser interpretado como um comentário sobre o fato de as experiências de muitas cidades metropolitanas serem modeladas pelo olhar de dentro de automóveis em movimento. O vídeo é um comentário paródico sobre a destruição atual do planeta e nossa maneira de representá-la. ● M.A.L.

Erin Coates developed a keen interest in the relationship between cinematic vision and the visual movement produced from a moving car. In an earlier work, *Driving to the Centre of the Earth* (2012), Coates is seen driving a car down a tunnel that reminisces organic cavities as she makes her way toward the center of the Earth. In this new work, *Driving to the Ends of the Earth*, the artist and her dog drive through explosions, demolitions, wildfires, and floods, with the camera sometimes facing forwards, sometimes backwards, revealing wholesale destruction by which the car's occupants seem quite unfazed. The car is packed full of provisions and supplies, and Coates goes through a string of banal acts as she drives, such as wiping down the dashboard and exercising with a hand gripper.

The work also explores the way news networks and digital platforms like YouTube transform the ways we react to images of disasters and catastrophes, which can be recorded, viewed, and reproduced over and over, wherever, whenever. In true road-movie spirit, Coates presents the car as a safe haven that shields us from the calamities going on around us in the places we drive through. This can also be interpreted as a comment on the extent to which the experience of many metropolitan cities is shaped by the windows of moving vehicles. The video is a parodical comment on the natural devastation of the modern age and the ways in which we represent it. ● M.A.L.

Driving to the Ends of the Earth, 2016  
video [video]



# BIENNIALS OF URGENCY

SOLANGE O. FARKAS

artistic director of the 21th Bienal de Arte Contemporânea  
Sesc\_Videobrasil

Under a new name, the 21st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc\_Videobrasil honors a long history of strategic shifts and changes of course: the decision to internationalize our main show in 1990; to train our focus on the global South in 1994; and to open up to all artistic languages in 2011. Once again, Videobrasil asserts its permeable nature, sensitive to the times, a living organism, constantly evolving, periodically allowing itself to shed old skin in order to better pursue experiences that set it more clearly en route to greet the new.

The new name does more than just anoint a periodicity. It reflects the perception that our structural logic, our investigative practice, and our curatorial aspirations are taking us beyond the remit of the multicultural festival into the role played today by international art biennials. Especially those that, over the last decade or so, have helped draft a more instigating and diverse panorama of global output by lending visibility to artists and projects that attract little appreciation and/or hail from regions that are less represented on the international scene.

Whether large, like Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, which, in only ten years, has eked out a space that puts it on a par with the major European biennials, small or medium-sized, such as Cuenca and Dak'Art, or iconic, albeit struggling with enormous difficulties, like Havana, many such events share the desire to showcase what is most vigorous in local or regional production and, at the same time, help redress the sidelining of a considerable parcel of today's contemporary art being created off the well-funded, well-mapped, and consolidated artistic grid.

Running counter to the spectacular, superlative biennials whose choices betray, increasingly blatantly, their lack of independence from—if not outright collusion with—the art system and market, these shows emerge from plural curatorial perspectives that are edgy and willing to take risks. Their ambition is not always to have an impact beyond their home territory, but rather to restore art to where it has relevance, namely, to a critical, restless, world-creating dimension.

There is, therefore, a pragmatic aspect to our name change, insofar as it aligns us more fully with our peers around the world: institutions and events that, like us, work to build and strengthen a parallel circuit for art produced in regions that are usually overlooked. And which, without dodging the pressing questions of our time, choose to favor curatorial projects, manifestations, and reflections that have something relevant to add to art and its role in a context of economic crisis and political retrocession.

The desire to map artistic production in regions with a colonial past in the so-called global South—in order to reveal research that has still not been shown and artists about whom not nearly enough has been said—remains our driving force as a Biennial. In order to do that, we have maintained the mechanism that has served us so well: the open call. It's the only way we can ensure equal opportunities for those off the customary circuits and who, lacking the rubber stamp of the art market and its gatekeeper critics, are potential revelations in their fields.

Up until now, the curatorial fronts that structured our exhibitions have always emerged out of the body of selected works. That principle is maintained in this edition, but with one crucial difference: for the first time, we have suggested a guiding theme to the participants right from the open call. The chosen theme, *Imagined Communities*, pits itself against the hackneyed nationalisms we see resurge today and suggests a utopia of a world rebuilt out of new networks and collectivities based on identities, emotional bonds, and affinities.

Derived from the homonymous essay by Benedict Anderson, the concept was a contribution of the researcher and curator Gabriel Bogossian, who also played a decisive role in the transformations put in place in the present edition, but under study since the previous one. Assistant curator of the Associação Cultural Videobrasil since 2017, Bogossian integrates, with the guests Luisa Duarte and Miguel Angel López, the curatorial team of this Biennial. Each of whom

brought to the process the benefit of research that reinforces “places of speech,” broadens themes for reflection, and deepens our curatorial proposal. Bogossian focuses on the visual representation of Brazilian indigenous peoples; Lopez, on South American and Caribbean production and the interconnectedness of dissident bodies on the contemporary art scene; and Luisa Duarte, on the political dimension of Brazilian artistic expression seen from a present and historical perspective.

In the wake of the recent Brazilian elections, it has become more urgent than ever for us to question which communities, not just imagined or supposed, can still be brought to bear in our daily lives. Prime targets for the incumbents, women and the LGBTQI+,<sup>1</sup> black and indigenous movements and other minority groups steel their community practices in response, bracing themselves to defend so recently hard-won rights. Rather than superpose and blend into one another, these possible communities seem to have taken on more clearly drawn contours and adopted more rigid rules of belonging.

Exploring the paths set down its curatorial project, the 21st Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc\_Videobrasil reaffirms its position in favor of these minority communities, bringing their artistic production and fight for their rights into the spotlight. As such, in addition to the actions we usually roll out through our international network of partner institutions, in order to reinforce and buttress the call in regions with little capillarity and fragmented circuits, for this edition we made a particular effort to reach out to specific segments.

The idea was, for example, to guarantee space for artists who are only ever included in thematic collective contemporary art shows, as if they somehow belonged to another breed of artist. Sometimes dressed up as deference, this sort of erasure affects artists from indigenous ethnicities and/or native peoples. To ensure that our call reached them, we were able to enlist the help of organizations that are references in relating to indigenous tribes, such as Instituto Socioambiental, or in fostering their audiovisual production, such as Vincent Carelli’s *Video nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages]. On the international level, we got in touch with agencies that support the cultural production of native peoples across Europe, Canada, Australia, the USA, and New Zealand.

Two thousand artists from 105 countries answered the open call for submissions to the 21st Biennial. The exhaustive analysis and selection process did not just consider proposals submitted specifically to the event, but also the portfolio of each artist who registered. In order to create a representative outline of the main concerns and practices revealed by the set of works, the curators and I rely on the collaboration of the Bahia-based Uruguayan Alejandra Muñoz and the Brazilians Juliana Gontijo and Raphael Fonseca, curators, critics

and professors who travel through fields such as art history, architecture and education.

To amplify the pressing questions posed by the selected works, we added the contributions of five other artists, the first two of which were Biennial commissions: Rosana Paulino, who, on her first foray into video, broaches issues of black memory, ancestral ties, and identity; Thierry Oussou, from Benin, who explores the incendiary presence of colonial memory; Andrea Tonacci, a pioneer in audiovisual militancy in favor of Brazilian indigenous ethnicities; Mexican Teresa Margolles, who deals with the violence of social experience in Latin American countries, especially against women; and the Syrian photographer Hrair Sarkissian, whose pictures focus on the fate of refugees and the politically persecuted. Chosen on poetic grounds and for their representative flavor, these artists add enormously powerful artworks to the debate on ancestral belonging, decolonization, indigenous communities, negritude, and State violence.

I share with the three curators the responsibility for selecting the contents of the three platforms that comprise the 21st Biennial: the exhibition segment, which, for the first time, gathers together in one and the same space selected and guest artists and collectives, fifty-five in all, from twenty-eight countries across Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; the public programs, which will run through to January 2020, featuring Brazilian and foreign thinkers and researchers delving into themes suggested and raised by the Biennial’s body of work, as well as performances and encounters with artists; and two publications, including this catalogue and a compilation of essays intended to prolong and reverberate the main reflections stirred by this encounter.

Lastly, but most importantly, I must stress the female presence here, which is deliberately striking, across every sphere of creation and decision-making behind the 21st Contemporary Art Biennial. In 2019, the residency, acquisition, and cash prizes offered by the Biennial will be awarded by an all-women jury comprised by Alexia Tala, curator-general of the Arte Paiz Biennial in Guatemala; the South African independent curator Gabi Ngcobo; the artist Rosângela Rennó; the art historian Reem Fadda, curator of the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism; and the Portuguese academic Marta Mestre, who taught at the Parque Lage Visual Arts School in Rio de Janeiro and currently lectures the history of non-Western art at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

Amidst the constantly renewed threats hanging over so many fundamental freedoms and values, it is a balm to be able to reaffirm and praise diversity,

transformative thought, and the exercise of culture. In this sense, we are more grateful than ever to Sesc São Paulo, whose partnership makes it possible for us to bring to fruition our project for the inclusion of relevant artists and necessary research on a circuit of visibility and exchange. We are proud to be a part of the generous and contemporary project of sociocultural formation the institution has pursued with such steadfast commitment over the last few decades.

For the first time, we occupy the iconic Sesc 24 de Maio building, a veritable oasis of leisure and culture for the surrounding population, including a significant contingent of refugees. There could be no more fitting venue for a Biennial that aims to explore the artistic repercussions of the nationalist wave sweeping across the world today and the backward-sliding cycle it has triggered, a Biennial that is open to Stateless, nation-less communities, bound by ties of origin and mysticism, migrations, and dissidences. ●

- 1 Initialism that stands for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, transgender, queer, intersex and asexuals, among other identifications.

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**SOLANGE O. FARKAS (Brazil, 1955).** With over four decades working on the cultural scene, she was chief curator of the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (2007–2010) and guest curator at numerous festivals and exhibitions, including *FUSO* (Portugal, 2011, 2013, and 2017), *Dak'Art – African Contemporary Art Biennale* (Senegal, 2016), the 6th Jakarta International Video Festival (Indonesia, 2013), 10th Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates, 2011), 16th Bienal de Cerveira (Portugal, 2011), and 5th Videozone – International Video Art Biennial (Israel, 2010). She is the founder and director of Associação Cultural Videobrasil, where she has spent years building an archive and an institutional partnership network spanning five continents. She has been artistic director of the Sesc\_Videobrasil festival and biennial since the maiden edition in 1983. In recent years, she featured on the jury panels of the 14th Sharjah Biennial (2019), the Awards Committee of the Prince Claus Fund Award (2017–2018), and the 10th Bamako Encounters – African Photography Biennial (Mali, 2015), and helped organize the *Anthropocene Project* exhibition at the Ilmin Museum of Art (South Korea, 2019). She is a juror on the EYE Art & Film Prize (Amsterdam) and a member of the advisory board to the art and culture venue Pivô, in São Paulo. In 2017, she received the Montblanc Arts Patronage Award (Germany), granted to professionals with outstanding careers in fostering a range of artistic and cultural expressions. She also sat on the international selection committee that chose the curators for the 11th Berlin Biennale, to be held in 2020.