



MANIFESTA, THE EUROPEAN BIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Manifesta, The European Biennial of Contemporary Art, was born as a nomadic contemporary art event, and it has developed into a flexible and mobile structure, capable of continually change and reinvention. Manifesta sees itself working with an open-ended process of dialogue, initiating international collaborative projects and adding a new dimension to a wide range of independently organised initiatives. At the same time, Manifesta sets out to develop new audiences for contemporary art and to stimulate new approaches to artistic production and display. Its various programs are designed to offer artists and curators alike the greatest possible freedom to experiment with innovative working methods and fresh approaches to communicate with the public.

In the early 1990s, Manifesta was launched as a unique, roving art event, a project devised by a Dutch initiative that later took shape as the International Foundation Manifesta (IFM), an independent and not-for-profit organisation with offices in Amsterdam. As a response to the political and economic changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the consequent moves towards European integration, it aspired to provide a dynamic platform that could support a growing network of visual arts professionals throughout the region. For this reason, from the outset Manifesta proclaimed that alongside its organisation of biennial exhibitions, it aimed to stimulate an expanding artistic network and to develop on-going workshops for research and experimentation, involving individual artists and artistic communities from diverse backgrounds from all over the continent. In adherence to its mandate of playing a critical role in the advancement and enhancement of dialogue within Europe, Manifesta has always sought to work with artists and professionals who might otherwise have limited access to the dominant mainstream discourse in contemporary art. This decision to incorporate complex situations and diverse geo-political areas has far-reaching implications, not only in terms of the evolution of Manifesta, but also in relation to the international art scene as a whole. The complex nature of each different location provides challenges as well as specific opportunities for each consecutive Manifesta edition. Each time, Manifesta aims to be engaged in a specific way, to make use of the location and its particular reality, not merely to utilise it for site-specific projects but rather to integrate the sites into the broader artistic project as a resource of intellectual capital to provide all participants with an ample opportunity for research and innovation.

As an itinerant biennial, Manifesta changes its location every two years in response to current artistic imperatives, combined with a variety of social, political and geographical considerations. It strives to keep a distance from what are viewed as the dominant centres of artistic production. Instead it looks for fertile ground for the mapping of new directions in curatorial practices, exhibition models and education.

From 1996 onwards, the Manifesta Biennial has taken place at regular two-year intervals, as follows:

- M1. Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 1996
- M2. Luxembourg, 1998
- M3. Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2000
- M4. Frankfurt, Germany, 2002
- M5. Donostia-San Sebastian, Spain, 2004
- M6. Nicosia, Cyprus, 2005-6
- M7. Trentino - Alto Adige, Italy, 2008

M8. Murcia and Cartagena in dialogue with northern Africa, 2010

The European cities or regions hosting successive editions of Manifesta are selected by Manifesta's Board and its Director according to a variety of flexible criteria, including social, political and geographical factors, finance, infrastructure and institutional stability, personnel considerations and, of course, the general artistic and intellectual context. Any European city, region, island or twin-cities can apply to host a Manifesta edition. Manifesta editions are mutually organised by both the Manifesta Foundation and local organisers, creating a new synergetic model for each new biennial.

The typical Manifesta biennium comprises a range of activities extending over two or more years, which includes meetings, discussions, seminars (the so-called 'Coffee Breaks'), publications and other activities, in a variety of different locations in Europe and the neighbouring regions, culminating in the final three-month long exhibition (or in 2006, an 'art school') in the host city itself. In this way, Manifesta aims to create an interface between prevailing international artistic and intellectual debate and the specific qualities and idiosyncrasies of a given location.

On a practical level, a high degree of continuity is provided by the logistical support of the Manifesta Foundation and its staff, the transferral of its cumulative knowledge base from one host city to the next, as well as their participation in all levels of the biennial and Manifesta programs. Whilst the Host and the Foundation both assume overall responsibility for funding and organising the biennial, Manifesta aspires to stimulate extra funding from international sources and start each biennium by providing the basic layers of a wide range of curatorial, managerial, organisational and logistic support.

What is the mission of Manifesta 8 according to the Board of the International Foundation Manifesta, and why did the Board select the region of Murcia and Cartagena in dialogue with northern Africa?

Inherent to the nomadic character of Manifesta is the desire to explore the psychological and geographical territory of Europe and its immediate neighbouring countries, both as concept and expanding topography. This process aims to establish closer dialogue between specific cultural and artistic situations and the broader, international context of contemporary art, theory and politics in a changing society. Manifesta has a pan-European vocation and it has successfully presented artists, young professionals and trainees, from as many as forty different countries. With the expansion of the European community from twelve to twenty-seven countries, with a possible target of around thirty in the foreseeable future, Manifesta aims to create links with Europe's neighbouring regions in Asia, the eastern Mediterranean and northern Africa, at the same time continuing to pay special attention to minority groups and cultures within Europe itself. Thus Manifesta looks forward to further expanding its artistic and professional network and to building new creative partnerships with organisations, curators, arts professionals and individuals, within Europe and beyond, as part of its widely connected map of contemporary art.

More information

Manifesta Foundation
Prinsengracht 175 hs
1015 DS Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 20 672 14 35
Fax: +31 20 470 00 73
E-mail: secretariat@manifesta.org