

# India's Biennale Effect

A politics of contemporary art

Edited by

Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani



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## INDIA'S BIENNALE EFFECT

India's Kochi-Muziris Biennale has been described as one of the most significant newly emergent biennales, alongside Shanghai, Sharjah and Dakar. However, there have been few sustained and critical studies of these events as specific *sites* of production and reception of contemporary art.

This book, engaging with the Kochi Biennale, provides detailed examination of what the editors term as the 'biennale effect' – a layered contestation of place, economics, art and politics. It presents a close reading of the unique context of the biennale as well as sets out a broader critical framework for understanding global contemporary art and its effects.

Replete with illustrations, this book will serve as an important and rare resource for scholars and researchers of contemporary art, art history, visual cultures and media studies.

**Robert E. D'Souza** is Head of Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, UK.

**Sunil Manghani** is Reader in Critical and Cultural Theory, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, UK.

'The Kochi-Muziris Biennale put India on the map of international contemporary visual culture. But the Biennale is much more than a global art event. *India's Biennale Effect* draws out the Biennale's greater complexity, revealing a movement of contemporary Indian citizens showing and telling their own story'.

**Chris Dercon**, *Director, Tate Modern, London, UK*

'This book is more than a source for "India's first biennale". It is a thoughtful, revisionist consideration of the received accounts of "biennale culture", as it has been articulated in *The Biennale Reader*, and by writers such as Hans Belting, Jacques Rancière and Nicholas Mirzoeff. D'Souza and Manghani provide a context to consider the relation between the visual and the "grounds of the political", and to articulate what it means, in Gandhi's image, to have "the cultures of all the lands" blow through the house, without tearing it down'.

**James Elkins**, *E. C. Chadbourne Chair of Art History, Theory, and Criticism, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA*

'With a focus on the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, founded in 2012, *India's Biennale Effect* maps the complex and shifting interrelationships among local cultural heritage, a regional art market and global cultural circulations that define the special nature and potential role of the biennale in India'.

**Ranjit Hoskote**, *co-curator, 7th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea*

'While the Kochi-Muziris Biennale is rooted in site specificity, its editions are capable of addressing audiences far beyond the city in which it takes place – to places where people across the globe can have a conversation. This book is the result of such conversations, yet equally explores the various competing and complementing frames and directions through which such dialogue must flow'.

**Marieke van Hal**, *Founder of the Biennial Foundation*

'More than the number of visitors or the media attention it receives, the success of a biennale should more importantly be measured in terms of its reverberations within the worldwide artists' communities as well as by its scholarly impact. With its in-depth academic writing, both thoughtful and entertaining, *India's Biennale Effect* is a testament to the latter and an important read for anyone interested in the arts'.

**Thomas Girst**, *Head of Cultural Engagement, BMW Group*

'*India's Biennale Effect* is situated at the heart of critical debates around global art history and contemporary artists' practice. It offers an array of fascinating insights into the unique conjunction of people, place, time, politics, economics and aesthetics that constitutes India's first Biennale'.

**Frances Morris**, *Director, Tate Modern, London, UK*

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Sunil Manghani*

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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The writing of this book, which has sought to bring together a number of different voices and perspectives, has very purposefully involved a good deal of conversation and collaboration. We are extremely grateful to each of our contributors – Dhritabrata Bhattacharjya Tato, Riyas Komu, Ryan Bishop, Hattie Bowering, Jitish Kallat, Anannya Mehhta and Amit Kumar Jain – for providing wonderful material and for their care and patience in helping us develop this book from a mere idea to a tangible object of thought. Of course, beyond our contributors, there are many others who have been supportive and influential in the making of the book. The book begins life in the offices of Wieden & Kennedy, in Delhi, following conversations with the creative director, V. Sunil (a trustee of the Biennale). His generosity of thinking has been invaluable. Likewise, we are greatly indebted to everyone at the Kochi Biennale Foundation. Special thanks go to Bose Krishnamachari and Shewtal Patel, as well as Gautam Das whose support, along with his team, has been excellent, helping us to be in touch with many different people involved in the Biennale and also to access the Foundation's archives. We are grateful to the Biennale photographers, Swanoop John, Aby P. Robin, Mohammed Roshan, Dheeraj Thakur and Sangeeth Thali, for enabling us to use their work, without which we could never have properly shown the reader what the Biennale really *looks* like. We are grateful to many people living locally in Fort Kochi; in particular we wish to thank Magic Johnson (whose insight into how the Biennale unfolds upon the streets was one of the best introductions we could have had), and David Jose, whose thoughtful collaboration in the making of *End of empire* (Chapter 8) was fundamental to the work *as social practice*. Finally, a big note of thanks to our editor at Routledge India, Shoma Choudhury, who has provided us with insight and encouragement from the start. Rather than an end point, we hope this book only extends our dialogue and collaboration with all involved.



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Figure 1.1a Kochi-Muziris Biennale poster on a wall in Fort Kochi, 2012.

Photograph: Robert E. D'Souza.



Figure 1.1b 'Biennale City' poster, Fort Kochi, 2014.  
Photograph: Sunil Manghani.

# INTRODUCTION

*Robert E. D'Souza and Sunil Manghani*

This book began life as an essay, 'The Indian Biennale Effect' (D'Souza, 2013), which was published in the journal *Cultural Politics* towards the end of 2013 – less than a year on from the inaugural Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India's west coast port of Kochi, in the state of Kerala. As the journal's strapline puts it, *Cultural Politics* 'explores precisely what is cultural about politics and what is political about culture'. Alongside photographic documentation, the essay provided a historical and political contextual account of the inauguration of the Biennale<sup>1</sup> and its 'effects' – which could be understood in terms of its impact on and relationship to the local and regional economy; the identity of Kochi as a locality for inhabitants, tourists and traders; the recent history of radical political modernization; the turn towards a new internationalism through the liberalization of markets and the rise of India's contemporary art scene (in the metropolitan centres of Mumbai and Dehli); and the growing critical discourse about a globalized biennale culture or phenomenon as considered by scholars, critics and curators.

The essay was a timely publication. Outside of the usual art reviews and magazine articles, little, if any, critical writing had appeared about the Biennale – despite it being arguably the largest such event in the South Asian region. Dubbed 'India's first biennale', it had launched auspiciously on the twelfth day of the twelfth month of 2012. Its initial development (particularly with regard to state finance) led to highly publicized political resistance. It was 'against all odds' (as the Biennale's Foundation has described it) that the first event was successfully staged. Since then, it has been widely referred to as a 'people's biennale'. In part this relates to the specific political context of Kerala, a region known for its long history of social action. But equally, it reflects the Biennale's artist-led curatorial approach and the state of the local infrastructure that prompted genuine ingenuity and commitment on the part of local, national and international artists and the wider community of Kochi (more of which is explored in Chapters 1, 3 and 9).

Picking up where the original *Cultural Politics* article left off, this book sets out to provide a detailed examination of India's 'biennale effect' – a layered contestation of place, economics, art and politics as charted specifically in Chapter 1, and then expanded upon in various directions in the subsequent chapters (see Overview). The Kochi-Muziris Biennale has been described as one of the most significant newly emergent biennales, alongside Shanghai, Sharjah and Dakar. However, aside from theoretical debates about art biennales as a global format, very little sustained and critical attention has been given to these events as specific *sites* of production and reception of contemporary art. Drawing on direct engagement with the Kochi Biennale, and ongoing collaboration with its founders and key participants, the contributors to this book provide a range of voices and perspectives, which get at a closer understanding of the Biennale and its significance to wider debates of contemporary art and large-scale art events in a global context. In doing so – in taking a measure of the Biennale's various effects – the different accounts take us beyond the art, beyond the mere occasion of exhibition, to provide a critical and contextual reading of the biennale format, to consider how it might properly be thought of as part of the fabric of a wider public sphere.

### Placing the Biennale

At first glance, Kochi is a somewhat surprising location for India's first biennale, being outside of the recognized centres of Indian contemporary art. Yet, the region of Kerala plays host to a number of global cultural events, including a well-established international film festival, theatre festival and a literary festival. The decision to host the Kochi-Muziris Biennale came in effect from the top. Kerala's cultural minister approached artists Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, asking them 'to suggest an event that would reaffirm the state's position on the cultural map' (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012: 16); and the final decision was made in the prime minister's office in New Delhi. However, the initial approach by the cultural minister to two practising artists was significant. Both Kerala-born, astute to the context they were working in, they took an artist-led approach, forming community with both participating artists and local residents and traders. It is an approach that has proved distinct for this particular Biennale and its relationship to the state (see Chapter 3).

Like any other densely populated, fast-growing city in the world, Kochi is overcrowded and suffers all the usual problems of urbanization. Yet it is also culturally 'rich'. It has a highly literate society and is host to significant populations of differing faiths, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The city's cosmopolitan roots, as

the centre of India's spice trade, dates back to ancient times when Muziris was a thriving port, and its more recent political history with a long-term Communist government has maintained a very lively, politicized populace. If it is possible to stage a biennale that is more than mere global spectacle, Kochi would seem as good a place to start. Of course, it was never simply a matter of curating an art event. Having to establish a biennale from scratch required dealing with politicians, bureaucrats, business people, journalists, vendors, contractors, volunteers and the local community more broadly. '[I]n a country like India,' the founders note, 'where art has a long history and which has produced some of the finest contemporary visual artists, the "culture of biennale" [was] yet to catch on. The word "biennale" . . . yet to be popular on the street' (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012: 35–36). They were determined not to let the Biennale be elitist, and established a 'Let's Talk' programme to re-engage the media and to connect directly with the local community:

We printed brochures in Malayalam and distributed among [the] general public. We shot photographs of . . . autorickshaw drivers, street vendors, shopkeepers and pedestrians with 'It's My Biennale' posters. We went into college campuses, schools, art clubs and organized many cultural and literary programmes in parks and other public places. Theatre Sketches, a theatre group which performs cameo, improvised plays, travelled in Ernakulam and neighbouring districts to spread the word about the biennale.

(Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012: 36)

The initiative paid off, as one of the most visible elements of Kochi's inaugural Biennale was its heterogeneous audience. However, what visitors arrived to was by no means a well-orchestrated event. The late withholding of funds was one significant pressure, but so was the relatively poor infrastructure. There was a general lack of technical experience and the use of derelict and former colonial buildings made the preparation of exhibition spaces extremely challenging. Even as delegates made their way round the opening of the exhibitions, wall captions were still being applied and catalogues being printed. As outlined in Chapter 1, attending the Biennale launch in 2012 was to witness a work-in-progress, not least with both Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu engaged hands-on with all aspects of the work involved to bring the exhibition spaces to fruition on time (or at least as close to on time as possible). This hands-on approach and the rawness of the exhibition spaces have been seen by many as a refreshing riposte to the 'non-spaces' we typically associate with art fairs and biennales around the world.



Figure I.2 'It's My Biennale' campaign posters.

Photograph: Swanoop John. Courtesy of Kochi Biennale Foundation.

The widespread phenomenon of art biennales is a feature (a symptom even) of late twentieth-century globalization. The pervading view is that:

[p]roduced by itinerant curators and nomadic artists who pay lip service to local concerns while addressing an increasingly mobile global spectatorship, biennials resemble multinational corporations in the sense that their sphere of action, power, and control transcends national boundaries while they are selectively benefiting from national frameworks of support and validation.

(Blom, 2009: 23)

Caroline Jones (2010) has spoken of a 'biennale culture' that stems from the empire exhibitions of the nineteenth century, and which re-positioned the artwork as a purely aesthetic *experience*, which she equates with the contemporary idea of 'experience marketing'. The links with tourism, heritage and city 'branding' are of course evident enough. Biennales are undoubtedly enmeshed in global models of consumption, but the political and historical narratives surrounding them are arguably rather more nuanced and plural (Martini, 2009). In fact, referring to a single biennale event or organization as a unified entity is itself a convenience. This book takes up the task of an extended analysis of a single biennale to offer a complex (and at times contested) reading of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and its effects. However, in doing so, from a close, embedded account of the Kochi Biennale, the aim is to connect with and challenge the broader discourse surrounding biennale culture and politics.

Biennales are associated with the emergence of 'global art', and synonymous with 'contemporary art', which has challenged a Eurocentric view. As Hans Belting puts it:

Global art is no longer synonymous with modern art. It is by definition contemporary, not just in a chronological but also . . . in a symbolic or even ideological sense. It is both represented and distorted by an art market whose strategies are not just economic mechanisms when crossing borders, but strategies to channel art production in directions for which we still lack sufficient categories.

(Belting, 2009: 39)

In 1982, when Salman Rushdie wrote his famous *Times* article, 'The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance', he was setting out an argument that concerned clear differentials of centre and periphery. His pun on the title of

the Star Wars film, *The Empire Strikes Back*, was significant, as the whole idea of 'writing back' required the re-appropriation of a language that was not one's own. The periphery had to write *outside* of itself in order to re-structure the asymmetrical relationship it had with the centre. Rushdie was dealing with the very same question of the revered Indian author Raja Rao (writing in English), who sought to grapple with conveying one's own spirit in a language that was not one's own. For Rushdie, however, there was a new sense of optimism and inventiveness. Today, it is easy enough to consider the development of a biennale culture – as it has spread across the globe – as yet another 'writing back'. Indeed, the rise of the art market outside of Europe is frequently read in postcolonial terms. Belting's observations of his 'Global Art and the Museum' conference held in India, in 2008, are of this nature, with India's colonial past reported still as a live issue. 'Counter-narratives increasingly replace narratives of Western modernism with different concepts such as the return to national narratives of Indian art,' he points out, yet, a general agreement among participants appeared to hold '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' (Belting, 2009: 47–48). Nevertheless, these observations do not necessarily stand up to the broader logic of global and contemporary art, nor, in the case of India, to the particular context, within which the Kochi-Muziris Biennale has emerged.

On arrival to Kochi in the very early stages of researching this book – indeed before it was even envisaged a book – we held an initial meeting with an artist at the Kochi airport. As we sat in the 'non-space' of the airport's nondescript café it was hard not to notice a large advertisement for European travel: 'Surrender to the Taste of Europe'. Despite the stereotypical gaze of such an advertisement, and indeed given our eagerness to be in Kochi and not a European city, it was difficult to see this poster as anything but the spectre of the decaying allure of elsewhere; a desperate call to action, to write back to a now de-centred destination. This, then, was the Kochi we had arrived to: a city enmeshed in the global, yet confident in its own language. The question we had to ask ourselves was whether it was legitimate for us – as new arrivals to the city – to be the ones to convey the spirit of the place, to adopt the new language of the Biennale (these dilemmas are given further consideration in the opening of Chapter 3). Importantly the book has been devised through extended dialogue with a number of participants of the Biennale and from numerous visits to the city to gain an ethnographic view of what goes into making a biennale – or to borrow a phrase of Riyas Komu, to 'taste the salt of Kochi' (Chapter 3).



Figure 1.3 'Surrender to the Taste of Europe' advertising poster, Kochi International Airport, July 2014.

Photo: Sunil Manghani.

### Through the object

The art biennale is a global genre, with all the complexities of globalized economics and politics. The idea of art as 'contemporary' and/or as 'experience' is something to be challenged and contextualized. As Thomas Fillitz (2009: 124) notes, '[a] striking feature of art biennials is the obvious inter-connection of art production'. In contrast to the museum, for example, which collects art, a biennale is about generating 'contemporary' work and

placing these in networks of circulation. There are inevitable contradictions at work, but equally as products of globalization each individual biennale offers its own site of engagement, which in turn can become a tool for a critical understanding of the interconnections at stake. To echo Siegfried Kracauer's remarks in the 1920s on the developments of mass culture (and its internationalization), in seeking to critically assess (and take up our position within) globalization – through phenomena such as the biennale – the process surely 'leads directly through the center of the mass ornament, not away from it' (Kracauer, 1995: 86). This is by no means to suggest a looking on from afar, to critically 'judge' sites of engagement, but rather for the sites themselves to be looking outward, to *be* critical points of conjuncture. The significance of 'location' is something that all biennales share, and all biennales differ over. As Monika Szewczyk (2009: 28) suggests, the location and *locating* of the biennale 'is to be understood as both a noun and verb (i.e. a process that has to continue), and how it relates not just to the "event", but also to the geographies it helps to imagine and render'. It is both as noun and verb that this book seeks to situate and re-articulate the Kochi-Muziris Biennale as a documented past and future return.

As discussed in the opening two chapters of this book, it is important to place the Kochi Biennale within the broader context of India's rapid economic growth and its associated social and cultural effects. The opening up of the country's protectionist economy in the early 1990s had a huge impact on the art scene, with many artists quickly becoming 'valued' international names. For some, economic liberalization was seen a step back to Western imperialism; taking this view the Biennale might well be construed within a corporatist model, as a form of experience marketing. Others, however, have viewed the changes as necessary to India's identification as a global trading nation. Both D'Souza (Chapter 1) and Tato (Chapter 2) demonstrate how the Kochi Biennale is a timely intervention for India's changing contemporary global identity. On the one hand, it fills a vacuum in India's infrastructure for the display and experimentation of contemporary art, yet equally it is bound up with a longer history of cultural diplomacy and later, after economic liberalization, the more subtle and expansive notion of soft power. As D'Souza's account sets out, the 'biennale effect' has to be understood as a set of complex, overlapping historical situations for India. These begin to cohere with India's first entry into the Venice Biennale (as late as the 54th edition in 2011), but then take shape much more viscerally with the inauguration of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

As part of understanding the contemporary conditions of India's 'First Biennale', and along the same lines of what has been termed 'altermodernity' (Bourriaud, 2009), it is important to distinguish between a Western and an Indian period of modernism. Over the last twenty years, a new,

hospitable context has rapidly emerged for Indian artists. It is a period in which cultural readings of India have needed to shift from a postcolonial discourse, to one attuned to the global, economic considerations of a new world order. Within this context, contemporary Indian artists have not needed to position themselves so much with being ‘modern’ on a national level, but rather have been able to garner wider international recognition and acceptance. As a corollary to this, the Biennale – which again, importantly, has not operated through the art world establishment of Mumbai or Delhi – has provided a new platform for Indian artists that is as much local as it is global, or altermodern in its purview. The account given in this book of India’s ‘biennale effect’ is broadly optimistic, but attuned to the paradoxes and heavy-handed forces of globalization. As with any other globalized art scene, India’s is an art *market*, pegged to the ebbs and flows of capitalism. 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.

As Blom (2009: 25) argues, a form of ‘contestatory strategy’ has emerged among many biennales that seeks to work against the globalist mode of the biennale and works ‘both with and against instrumentalizing forces on regional and national levels’. The strategy is ‘site-specificity’, which for years, she notes, has been ‘the preferred way of anchoring all the mobile forces invested in a biennale’s production in something indisputably and concretely local’. Kochi’s first biennale, quite understandably, took this approach, providing an underlying rationale which cut across economics, history, politics and culture. The full title, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale makes explicit reference to the ancient city of Muziris that was buried ‘under layers of mud and mythology after a massive flood in the 14th century’ (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2012: 20). The site of this original port of Kochi has recently been excavated as part of a national project, the Muziris Heritage Project, which is intricately linked to an initiative, working with UNESCO, to formally recognize its place within the maritime ‘silk road’. The use of the old colonial buildings immediately triggers relational aesthetics, and certainly some of the most striking exhibits for the Biennale’s first iteration were explicitly about the site of Kochi. *The Ship of Tarshish* by the Indian artist Prasad Raghavan was a finely crafted metal sculpture of a container ship (like a giant Tonka toy), which was on show at Aspinwall House. The title alludes to a Hebrew biblical reference to a place or city between which there was trade by sea. Crucially, the backdrop to the sculpture – through



*Figure 1.4* The international container terminal in Vallarpadam in Kochi, 2012. This view of the shipping lane can be seen directly from the Biennale venues of Pepper House and Aspinwall House, and indeed impacts strongly on the visitor's sightline when viewing many of the artworks.

Photograph: Robert E. D'Souza.

the arched windows of Aspinwall House – was a view across the water of Kochi's vast port, the country's newest international container terminal in Vallarpadam. A similarly evocative work, due to its use of real, pungent spices and which again overlooked the existing shipping lanes transporting the same local spices internationally, was *Life Is a River*, by Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto. The installation consisted of suspended local fabrics filled with spices of clove, cumin and turmeric, which were hung from the ceiling of a former colonial warehouse. At Pepper House, another old colonial building, a video installation was shown by Collaboration Around Micro Politics (CAMP), an artists' collective from Mumbai. The videos record the imports and exports at the local port harbour in Kochi, documenting the work cycles and repetitive labour of one of the main historic port hubs in the city while mirroring a globally occurring cycle of movement through trade. And *Stopover*, an installation of traditional grindstones by Indian artist Sheela Gowda and Christoph Storz, was laid out at Aspinwall House. It was possible to walk among the grindstones like redundant rocks. With the shift to electrical grinders, the installation offered the legacy of abandoned



Figure 1.5 *The Ship of Tarshish*, by Indian artist Prasad Raghavan at Aspinwall House, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, 2012. The title alludes to a Hebrew biblical reference to a place or city between which there was trade by sea. The backdrop to the sculpture is the country's newest international container terminal in Vallarpadam across the water.

Photograph: Robert E. D'Souza, 2012.

utensils as a reminder of change and of the 'daily grind' and hard manual labour of everyday life for the majority of Indians.

Interestingly, Blom poses a challenge to site-specificity. Echoing perhaps the aforementioned reference to Kracauer's suggestion to work *through* the 'mass ornament', Blom positions the phenomenon of the biennale as a 'place' within globalization, which warrants investigation:

if biennials actually contribute to the construction of one big place (the global, media-dependent megacity), then only an engagement with the specificities of *that* place can provide a set of realistic tools with which to understand the positioning and meaning of the various geographical locations that play host to the different biennials. By the same token, a counter-discourse of biennial politics or an imagination of the biennale's potential needs to start from these parameters.

(Blom, 2009: 25)



Figure 1.6 *Life Is a River* (2012), an installation of sewn and suspended local fabrics filled with spices of clove, cumin and turmeric by Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto, hung from the ceiling of the vacant warehouse in Moidu's Heritage, a colonial-period storage facility owned by a coconut-fibre company. The work overlooks the shipping lanes of the boats that are still transporting these local spices internationally.

Photograph: Mohammed Roshan, 2012. Courtesy of Kochi Biennale Foundation.

It is important to remain vigilant to the biennale as a 'mediated event culture' and to understand how a biennale is situated as part of the social fabric. For Blom (2009: 26), this requires 'an in-depth consideration of biennial temporality or – even more pertinently – biennial memory'. Given the biennale's biannual structure, the dilemma is always for an itinerant crowd to descend upon the site of the event and then disappear again, taking the memory of the event with them. As charted in Chapter 3, this is a concern well-noted by the Biennale organizers, and indeed the Biennale itself (as event) is only really a part of what is intended by the Biennale's effect all year round. As Blom notes, we are familiar with 'the museum as a form of archival practice that must be thought in the context of a more general organization of social memory'. Yet, the biennale 'memory' remains 'an as yet unexplored topos'. Her concern is that 'biennial memory is restricted to the archiving of catalogues and other documentary material, which is isolated as a special line of production that does not really



*Figure I.7* Multichannel video installation by CAMP, an artists' collective from Mumbai, at Pepper House, 2012. The videos record the imports and exports at the local port harbour in Kochi, documenting the work cycles and repetitive labour of one of the main historic port hubs in the city while mirroring a globally occurring cycle of movement through trade.

Photograph: Robert E. D'Souza.

impinge on the curatorial and artistic event themselves'. The task, then, is to approach the biennale as a 'new mediatic urban structure that operates across (and beyond) geographical territories' and understand that it represents 'a new form of social memory' that should be investigated and rethought as a site for intervention and reorganization' (Blom, 2009: 26). Pivotal in any consideration of the 'biennale effect' is an understanding of the delicate negotiation between the 'one big place' of the biennale format and the specificity of its location. Scholars, critics and curators each have an intellectual role to play in critically challenging this space, but equally so does the broader community that make up a biennale. As developed in Chapter 1 (and later in Chapter 9), we can take our cue from the writings of Jacques Rancière (2009) on the 'emancipatory effect' of art. The 'event' of the Kochi Biennale might take us back to a discourse emerging postindependence seeking to characterize art in India as going beyond capitalist spectacle, and even, with the contemporary art as articulated through the