

# Socle du Monde

BETWEEN CULTURES · BIENNALE



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# Foreword

By Holger Reenberg



Piero Manzoni, "Socle du Monde", 1961  
Photo: Ole Bagger

Socle du Monde has a firm framework for its overall processes and approach: To establish co-operation between artists and businesses, institutes of education, or other public institutions. The historical backdrop to this framework is the collaboration between shirt manufacturer Aage Damgaard and Italian artist Piero Manzoni back in 1960 and 1961; a collaboration which gave rise, among many other works, to the sculpture Socle du Monde now housed at HEART. Today, the historic co-operation between the two is recreated and updated in a biennial format.

On the one hand, Socle du Monde is a conventional biennial that takes its point of departure in the "event" culture that can be used to direct attention to ever-changing political/ social agendas. On the other hand, however, the biennial also has a layer of memory embedded within; it is, as it were, born out of the Earth, out of the original collaboration of the 1960s. Even so, it is first and foremost the results of that collaboration – the sculpture Socle du Monde and 36 other works by Manzoni – that ensure historical continuity for the city of Herning's biennial.

One could claim that there is a certain irony in having Manzoni's work form the springboard for – and providing the name for – a biennial, as large portions of his work can also be read as a form of resistance against the commercialisation of art. On the other hand, however, the choice of name also entails a certain obligation to art's critical, self-critical, appropriating, and subversive activities. Art engages in a kind of fifth column activity, a clandestine endeavour which can be supported within the biennial setting through co-operation involvement and artistic freedom thereby also occasioning a modernisation of the event's *raison d'être* and scope.

The team of artists participating in the 2010 Socle du Monde places the biennial within the field known as interculturalism. Interculturalism is about cultural exchanges between people and groups with different cultural identities. Interculturalism is an aspect of globalisation and of multiculturalism. But whereas globalisation is driven by and towards the global economy, the driving force behind interculturalism is the individual and cultural dialogue. And whereas multiculturalism focuses on the population patterns of the Western world as a melting pot, interculturalism encompasses cultural exchanges between the Third World and the West as well as cultural exchanges between different cultural groups within any country.

Interculturalism does not aim to abolish the differences and identities which are fundamentally, and in the widest sense of the word, founded in language. Quite the contrary: Interculturalism is about true acceptance of differences and about an awareness of how differences are an asset for the community.

Between Cultures can be said to be a description of any culture and any individual within the global agenda today. To be "between cultures" is, of course, not just a new global situation, nor is it just a new political agenda. Similarly, those who find themselves "between cultures" are not just positioned between national and/or regional cultures; rather, they are suspended between an almost infinite number of cultures. We have already pointed to the encounter between the business and art communities within the Socle du Monde biennial as just two of the multi-dimensional web of cultures that constitute society's – and each individual's – space today.

The artists participating in Between Cultures serve to illustrate this fact. How could they do otherwise, one might reasonably object; for the title itself not only refers to the conditions prevailing in intercultural processes; it also indirectly hints at a universal and historical dimension.

Between Cultures seeks to combine an horizontal process, in which art focuses on a global and local political agenda, with a vertical historical exploration of the impact of art and its more or less autonomous space in relation to globalisation. Naturally, the relatively limited number of participating artists does not allow the exhibition to offer an exhaustive study of the ongoing political debate and historical/artistic developments.

In this context it is almost absurd to speak of "Danish" and "international" artists; the theme itself accentuates how they are all international. Even so, one guiding principle behind the biennial has stated that Danish artists – of Danish and non-Danish ethnicity – should work side by side with an international team. Overall, the contributing artists have been invited because their works have addressed their own perception of how art, individuals and cultures have been affected by globalisation. We have sought to incorporate a history-based study of art's response to globalisation by letting several generations of artists have a say.

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The 2010 Socle du Monde biennial is accompanied by two additional exhibitions which provide a context for the Socle du Monde Biennial and focuses on the importance of the works of Piero Manzoni and the debates they continue to generate.

## **Shit or Gold?**

A study and presentation of the impact of Piero Manzoni's art. Special attention is focused on Merda d'Artista and on the debates that have surrounded the work since 1961.

## **The Sideshow**

The exhibition presents works created during the past four Socle du Monde biennials. The exhibits include works by artists such as Nedko Solakov, Renato Dib, Lillibeth Cuenca, John Kørner, Alexandra Mir, Belu Simion-Fainaru.



Piero Manzoni with "Merda d'artista" 1961.  
Photo: Ole Bagger

# Out in reality...

By Lotte Philipsen

**I** You take: Some used cardboard boxes from Thailand, vast amounts of leaf gold, an artist born in Vietnam, but domiciled in Berlin; a mortgage bank, Bowditch's US system of marine navigation, and an art museum in Herning. If you combine these objects and entities you will arrive at one of the works at the Socle du Monde biennial; we will get back to that later. Even now, however, we have established that the fifth Socle du Monde biennial is a heterogeneous affair full of complex geographic and artistic constructs. The French overarching title, which means "base of the world", points outwards across national boundaries, as does the English title of this specific biennial: *Between Cultures*. But not just the exhibition titles have an international ring to them; so does the theme itself – it has a "something-to-do-with-the-world-and-different-cultures" feel to it, so let us take a closer look at that.

In 1953 the cultural critic Raymond Williams stated that we use the word "culture" in two overall, yet different ways.<sup>1</sup> The concept is used to describe our general ways of living (our habits, customs, and rituals in the widest sense of the word, e.g. whether we eat meat and two veg and bike to work), as well as in a narrower sense to describe the realms of art (for example, theatre and the visual arts are part of "culture", whereas meat and two veg and commuting belong within the sphere of everyday life). When speaking about being "between cultures", the case usually concerns the former, i.e. anthropological, take on the concept.

But this anthropological approach to culture has also been on the agenda within the art scene over the course of the last three decades; critical questions on issues pertaining to ethnic, racial, and regional equality have shaped a revolt against the fact that Western cultural powers-that-be (museums, critics, and art historians) have in the past acted in ways that discriminated against non-Western artists. In days gone by the Western art institution applied a somewhat stereotypical, anthropological view of art, meaning that e.g. an African artist could have their art exhibited in the West if, and it is an important if, the works were hand-carved wooden masks, but not if they employed the same "modern" media as Western artists. The works of an African could be accepted as "African art", not simply as "art" on a par with Western art.<sup>2</sup>

Now, however, the ongoing globalisation with its trade agreements, rapid communication, and opportunities for migration has pulled the entire world closer together – these days Chinese

currency politics affect growth in the USA and, in turn, house prices in Denmark; we follow the fates of trapped miners in Chile with bated breath; politicians fight over what groups of people to allow to enter our country – and as this has happened the art scene, too, has been globalised. When *Between Cultures* offers us works by artists born in countries as far apart as Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Philippines, Denmark, Vietnam, Bulgaria, South Korea, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, and Uruguay, this ties in very well with the process of internationalisation that contemporary art has undergone. None of the works in the exhibition have Danish titles, and in fact it doesn't even make sense to divide the contributing artists into groups by their country of birth; today many artists live, work, or look for inspiration in countries other than their native home and often also exhibit their work or are affiliated with a gallery abroad.

Whereas artists and their works would formerly be regarded as anthropological stereotypes, nowadays it is often artists who cast a critical gaze on such stereotypes in their works. For the Socle du Monde biennial Christian Danielewitz and Christian Botale have created the work *The fourth estate and the fifth column*, which addresses the ways in which Western media portray Africa. A row of laptops broadcast different TV channels and their news coverage about the African continent, but the status that media hold as the "fourth estate" is difficult to assess when it comes to creating images of states other than the one to which the given media itself belongs, for on whose behalf are such media watching out? Are they looking out on behalf of African states or on behalf of the Western states who, by virtue of their colonial past, share a great deal of the responsibility for the creation of the Africa we see today?

Perhaps Western media actually come to exercise as a kind of fifth-column activity, undermining the chances that African voices have of being heard. Danielewitz creates an alternative to the media cacophony by inviting Botale from The Democratic Republic of the Congo to present his version of the story during a performance at the exhibition. Among other things, the story is about the dangerous and wearying work that Congolese miners carry out in pursuit of coltan (or columbite-tantalite), from which minerals important to the manufacture of electronic devices are extracted – devices like those used to display Western media coverage of Africa.

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams: "The Idea of Culture" in *Essays in Criticism*, vol. III, no. 3, July 1953, pp. 239-266

<sup>2</sup> Lotte Philipsen: *Globalizing contemporary art*, 2010, Aarhus University Press

The complexity inherent in truly getting to grips with a place, or culture, in a work is also suggested in Ismar Cirkinagic's work KPTN Installation 1. It consists of one of the very best pieces of stereo equipment that money can buy emitting classical music by composers such as Prokofiev, Chopin, and Bartók out across the exhibition. The value of the stereo system – DKK 564,000 – corresponds to the so-called repatriation subsidy that the Danish state would pay the artist and his family to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and by letting music by great composers who have experienced a life in exile flow forth from the potent loudspeakers, the work addresses a social issue in a beautiful and poetic manner – on the surface of things, at least. In so doing the work calls attention to the split between artistic-aesthetic surface on the one hand and the political issues that lie beneath the façade on the other. The 'KPTN' of the title is the name of a protein encoded by the human gene, one that causes humans to lose the sense of hearing. Thus, the work points to the potential deafness to the fact that Ismar Cirkinagic the artist is celebrated (in 2010 he was awarded a three-year work grant from the Danish Art Foundation), whereas Ismar Cirkinagic the man is regarded as a problem that Denmark should ideally expel.

Like Danielewitz and Cirkinagic, artists such as Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen and Jette Hye Jin Mortensen focus on being between cultures in an anthropological sense. Rasmussen does so in the form of eight portraits in which people she knows have been made up and dressed to mimic ethnicities other than their own (for example, we see "white" Danes appearing as Latinos or Japanese geishas, and a "black" person made up to appear Caucasian), while Mortensen presents a video installation in which actors re-enact scenes from the artist's life as an adopted child.

**2** However, the geographic realm is not the only one encroaching on the Western art scene of yesteryear. Economic, political, and material culture, too, have invaded the art scene. For example, one of the distinctive traits of the Socle du Monde biennial is that each participating artist co-operates with a particular business while preparing their work. In some cases the collaboration takes the form of monetary support and intellectual exchanges, meaning that it is not directly evident in the work itself, but in other cases concrete traces of the co-operation can be clearly discerned. For example, Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen's portraits of ethnic transformations are photographs transposed onto thick carpets, a concept that

she is unlikely to have employed if she had not been co-operating with the carpet company *egetæpper a/s*; the reason why Danielewitz' media news are displayed on laptops rather than TV sets or mobile phones may be that he co-operated with IT Relation A/S; and Jette Hye Jin Mortensen's video installation is built from materials usually used for fitted kitchens because her collaboration partner, *Jæger Holding A/S*, works within that particular business.

So the artists have entered into close-knit alliances with the business community; what kind of impact does this have on the freedom of artistic expression? The answer is: None. In fact, the entire notion that art stands apart from other social domains such as these is exactly that: Just a notion. In the Middle Ages, for example, European art was inextricably tied to the Christian world view and artists were anonymous craftsman commissioned by the Church. Art was so intricately linked with the rest of society that it did not exist as an independent entity the way it does today – rather, practices such as carving or painting were perceived as so-called mechanical arts on a par with farming and cooking.

Not until the mid-18th century did Europe begin to employ the concept of fine arts (poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture) as something that is intended to cause aesthetic enjoyment as opposed to other practical chores characterised by having a clear utilitarian objective.<sup>3</sup> Separate institutions for fine arts were gradually established – giving rise to the modern-day art museum which is the reserve of the visual arts; it does not, like the cabinets of the past, include suits of armour, conch shells, or for that matter peas that have emerged from under twenty eiderdowns and a princess. If we imagine that the fictitious pea from Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale was to be placed within a museum today, it would belong at the National Museum of Denmark alongside the suit of armour, whereas the conch shell would be housed at the Museum of Natural History. The National Gallery of Denmark is in charge of the visual arts, including works that predate the 18th century, but which are nevertheless now categorised as art rather than as e.g. nature or culture in the wider sense of the term.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that art is a construct rather than a natural given is recognised by the Socle du Monde biennial by having each individual artist enter into co-operation with an "outside" business. In actual practice art has never existed as something pure and

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant: *Kritik af dømmekraften*, (1790) 2005, Det lille forlag (The Critique of Judgment/*Kritik der Urteilkraft*)

<sup>4</sup> For more about the Danish museum services and their separation into individual segments from the late 18th century onwards, see Ane Hejlskov Larsen, Vinnie Nørskov, and Hanne Teghhus: "Danmark på Museum" in Ole Høiris (ed.): *Romantikens verden*, 2008, Aarhus Universitetsforlag

untainted, cloistered from the world: A work of art consists of physical materials that are often produced elsewhere by quite ordinary workers; artists must make a living in order to care for their children, and so most works are objects for trade even as they are also works of art. In that sense you may as well render the ties to the wider world entirely visible by putting it within a systematic framework the way that the Socle du Monde biennial does – and as Nedko Solakov does in his work *Help*. The artist asked his biennial partner, the communications agency IB Gruppen, to help turn around the failing sales of the artist's work by means of a new strategy. The usual approach – selling the artist's hand-drawn drawings through a gallery – has failed and instead the IB Gruppen suggests that he should set up a website where potential buyers can modify the motifs digitally, select different colours, sizes, etc., place their order and then receive a print via mail a few days later. The sales concept created by IB Gruppen is exhibited alongside the works that Solakov has difficulties selling, forcing us to consider the relationship between the two different cultures – the un-utilitarian art and the purpose-oriented world of advertising. Both create images, but in institutional terms they are miles apart in the general course of ordinary life.

Just as cultures in the anthropological sense of the world do not exist in a state of isolation from the rest of the world, art does not occupy an hermetically sealed glass jar. Even so the concept of the autonomy of art is perpetuated, e.g. through institutions specifically devoted to art (e.g. museums, exhibitions, biennials), and there may actually be good reasons for this. For it is the notion of the autonomy of art that allows us to use the works to see and observe the functional utilitarian value of everyday systems “from the outside in”. A case in point would be Jens Haaning's work. Haaning has co-operated with Nordea, a banking business that contributed to the work *An Average Danish Year Income* in a very specific way. They provided the artist with materials in the form of DKK 280,000 in cash, which has been carefully placed in neat rows inside a large frame. The usual symbolic value of money – which means that they can be exchanged for something else that has an actual value for the buyer – is suspended in the exhibition space where the symbols are stripped of their magical ability to transform themselves into something else. Instead they are displayed as concrete, empty, or “stupid” objects. Only few of us carry around large denomination bills in our wallets on a daily basis, but here we have the opportunity to lose ourselves in the rows of profiles showing the Anchors and in the silver holograms on the many grey and reddish pieces of paper.

Even though everyone who works has an annual income, we never see it as specifically and concretely as here. Haaning is showing us something familiar in an unfamiliar way; this is made possible by the autonomous art space precisely because the works do not need to have any utilitarian value except from evoking wonder, fascination, and unease.

3 But the flow of things can also take the opposite direction. Instead of introducing political, economic, and social realities in the art space, art can position itself outside of the art space and disrupt utilitarian everyday life. One example would be Joachim Hamou's work *Headlines*, created in co-operation with the Danish financial newspaper *Børsen*. Hamou simply used *Børsen* as his exhibition platform by having them run six different texts in the newspaper during the six days leading up to the official opening of the Socle du Monde biennial. The texts consisted of brief statements printed in very large types, e.g.: “Til rette vedkommende” (“To whom it may concern”), “Der var engang” (“Once upon a Time”) or “Her stopper forestillingen” (“The Show Ends Here”). As no pictures or other texts were associated with these large headlines they appeared as meaningless fragments that made no sense as articles nor as advertisements; it is very likely that readers never realised that they were in fact a work of art.

Here, the audience – who do not necessarily even know that they are an audience – quite unintentionally occupy a position between different cultures: On the one hand they are engaged in the purpose-driven act of reading a business-oriented newspaper, and on the other hand they have the puzzling and perhaps annoying experience of having a statement which makes no sense in its context thrown right out at them. Precisely because the audience is caught unaware, entirely unprepared for finding art in their morning paper, the work becomes particularly “use-less”. When we enter a museum we expect to find art – even if we are unprepared for its exact form or appearance – and so we attribute a purpose to art in the midst of its autonomous art space: That of being art. If, however, we come across it in the purpose-oriented realm of everyday life there is a chance that the sense of wonder, fascination, and unease becomes all the greater even if we never realise that what we experienced was in fact art.

Rather than speaking of breaks between different cultures in the anthropological sense of the term, many of these works show

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In 1961 Piero Manzoni created many works in Herning, including Socle du Monde, which is a heavy iron and bronze sculpture in the shape of a base or plinth placed directly at HEART and bearing the legend "Socle du Monde" upside down, thereby transforming the work of art into a simple base and the rest of the world into the work of art itself. The work has lent its name to the Socle du Monde biennial.

us that we should perhaps instead speak of breaks and clashes between different systems. Such incompatible systems are everywhere, including outside of the realm of art, and art can help us see them – not in order for us to correct or adjust them, but because they are a fundamental condition for the ways in which we arrange and organise ourselves together with others.

Take, for example, Danh Vo's work, which bears the same title as the biennial and Manzoni's original piece: Socle du Monde.<sup>5</sup> The work consists of a quantity of flat, used cardboard boxes from Thailand placed on the walls and covered in leaf gold; the bare cardboard remains visible in places, causing a number of large letters to appear. The letters are a reference to a naval navigation system invented by the American Nathaniel Bowditch in the 19th century. Here, then, an abstract navigational system meets a very concrete example of transport – Thai boxes brought to Herning – and something shiny and valuable covers a simple, functional material. Towards the floor the flat gold wall takes on a more sculptural, three-dimensional form, thereby going from being an image to take on a more insistent physical presence in the spectator's space. Even though we cannot tell from the work where Danh Vo graduated from, or that he cooperated with Nykredit – just as we cannot immediately tell whether our everyday shopping was made by child labour, is good for the environment, etc. – such issues from "reality" are (still) inextricably interwoven with art "itself".

## Artists Companies

The artists supply ideas and sketches for a work of art.

The companies provide production facilities and expertise

Christian Botale

A Hereford Beefstouw

Christian Danielewitz

C.C. CONTRACTOR A/S Herning

Danh Vo

Dagbladet Børsen/Cand.Selv

Hesselholdt & Mejlvang

egetæpper a/s

Ismar Cirkinagic

IB Gruppen  
- IB&Co, Co3, NewsRoom

Jannis Kounellis

IT Relation A/S

Jens Haaning

Jæger Holding A/S

Jette Hye Jin Mortensen

Montana Møbler A/S

Joachim Hamou

Nordea

Kimsooja

Nykredit

Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen

TEKO

Marcelo Viquez

Nedko Solakov

Thierry Geoffroy



heart

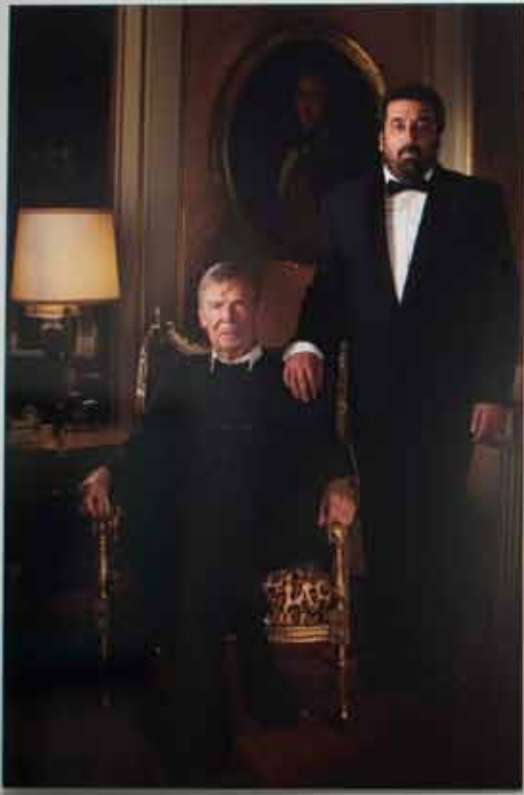


Thierry Geoffroy: "In Advance of the broken Arm. Can the artist prevent the accident?"





Marcelo Viquez: "Breve parodia de un intercambio culturel"  
cooperation with Montana A/S



Marcelo Viquez: "Prevalece la cultura ante la caída de los imperios?"



Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen: "I want you under my skin"  
cooperation with egetæpper a/s





Jette Hye Jin Mortensen: "The Sliding Doorway"  
cooperation with Jæger Holding A/S



1979  
2010

2010  
3010

Danh Vo: "Socle du Monde"  
cooperation with Nykredit





Joachim Hamou: "Headlines"  
cooperation with Dagbladet Børsen/Cand.Selv



Nedko Solakov: "Help"  
 cooperation with IB Gruppen IB og Co , Co3, NewsRoom

...the artist's work is a...  
 ...the artist's work is a...  
 ...the artist's work is a...



Follow your art...



Original art 4.000 € - Enjoy



How is the product promoted?

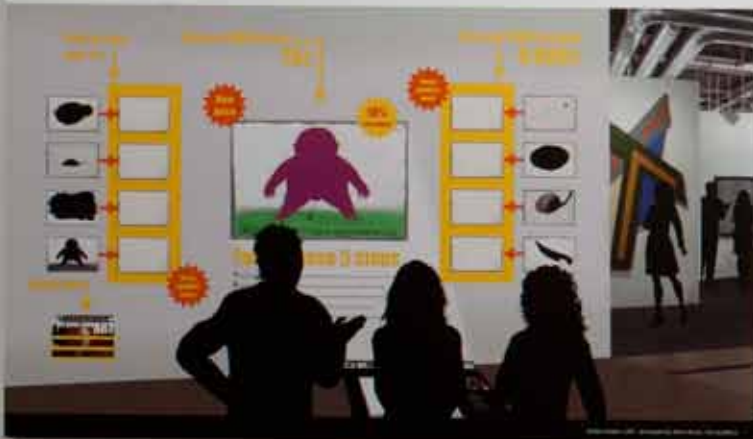
As the art exhibition system can get a lot of...  
 ...the artist's work is a...  
 ...the artist's work is a...

Step by step process:

1. Choose the colors, palette
2. Start to make the artwork
3. Create your own content, using the elements and colors of your design
4. Create finished, single work ready
5. The using your own tool
6. Start your work with your own hand in a matter of days

...the artist's work is a...  
 ...the artist's work is a...  
 ...the artist's work is a...

Exhibition



Poster 75 € - Enjoy



Economy

...the artist's work is a...  
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PENETRATION



WE FEEL FOR YOU

THE FABRIC



WE WILL WIN

لا تتركوا

AL-JAZIRA

FOR REAL IMMIGRANTS ONLY







Christian Danielewitz & Christian Botale: "The fourth estate and the fifth column"  
cooperation with IT Relation A/S





Hesselholdt og Mejlvang: "Livingroom"  
cooperation with Teko



Ismar Cirkinagic: "2KPTN, Installation 1"  
cooperation with A Hereford Beefstouw





Kimsooja: "Thread Routes"  
Special project

