

Editorial

The decision by *OBOE*'s editors to dedicate a special issue to the Bienal de São Paulo is a response to the remarkable surge in contemporary studies of the cultural phenomenon. However, despite the Bienal's undeniable significance, it is important to recognise that scholars have only belatedly begun to pay dedicated attention to it.

Periodic large-scale international exhibitions of contemporary art have gradually become institutions of legitimisation for artists and other actors within the art system. However, their role goes beyond artist recognition and curatorial research. Biennials are also at the crossroads of multiple dynamics, including politics (whether local, regional or transnational), economic interests often linked to infrastructure or the development of the tourist industry, cultural relations that commonly overlap with issues of cultural diplomacy, and so on. In the case of the history of the Bienal de São Paulo, which is one of the most important contemporary art events in the Americas, the resulting investigation seems to spread out in many directions, the common thread of which is the positioning of Brazil within an international art market and as a connecting point for the entire region.

However, the success of the exhibition, which is reflected in its longevity - the Bienal, modelled after the Venice Biennale, began in 1951 - has always had an unstable trajectory, marked by crises and interruptions, and, as it was founded by the São Paulo magnate Francisco Cicillo Matarazzo, the history of the Bienal de São Paulo has also been plagued by a curious mixture of personalism and official diplomatic relations.

Despite this problematic mix of official and personal interests, the first biennial on the American continent successfully generated an unprecedented influx of artworks, art professionals and ideas in the region, creating an institutional space for the display and theorisation of avant-garde art and other artistic expressions.

It is hoped that this publication will prove exemplary and that forthcoming issues of *OBOE Journal* can be devoted to different biennials on a regular basis. These will focus on the specific histories and issues raised by the context surrounding particular biennials and examine their legacies accordingly.