

Klaus Siebenhaar

d documenta.
A BRIEF HISTORY
OF AN EXHIBITION
AND ITS CONTEXTS

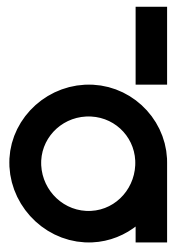
B&S SIEBENHAAR VERLAG

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Fridericianum Museum Square,
II. documenta, 1959

Preface

The history of documenta reflects more than just the substantial lines of development and tendencies of art in the 20th century. Of course, documenta bears witness to the great masters and the defining artists of modernism and the relevant contemporary art. documenta shows all of the important styles of art and aesthetic innovations and it documents the relentless expansion of the concept of art. However, in the end, 60 years of documenta tell the story of spaces – of social, political, cultural and common spaces, that were created by modern art in the past 100 years. These museum, playfully-eventful, urban and global spaces of art are the central basis of this book. The exhibition itself becomes a medium of aesthetic transformation, artistic reception and intervention of life and world. Thereby, especially the idea, understanding and forms of artistic production and staging in the course of time and society shall be illustrated. The history of curating as "art of second order" (Arnold Bode) can be portrayed through documenta. The artistic spaces which were defined by every single documenta address art discourses that remain true until today such as freedom and society, work and event aesthetic, transdisciplinarity and science, criticism of the museum and art market, eurocentrism and globalisation, ecology and interculturality, urban development and sociality. The four central development phases – "Reconstruction", "Transformation", "Anything Goes" and "Global Discourse" – seek to tell the story of documenta by providing fundamental orientation and context and to inspire to reflect on the art world of today. This scenario is embedded in a prologue on Arnold Bode as the founder, doer and inspirer of the early documenta years as well as chapters on the organisation and visitor development, but also the history



Reconstruction: The "Big Sculpture Room",
documenta, 1955

and practice of arts education. For this is what documenta stands for as a prominent example: contemporary arts education by means of visual understanding, visitors' school, lectures and design. The fundamental contexts to understand documenta are completed with meaningful statistics and figures.

Whether it is about budgets or the expansion of the exhibition venues almost across the entire city – behind all those figures and facts lie programmatically artistic-cultural, organisational and aesthetic-social transformation processes of the past 60 years. Not least, the complete list of artists indicates a new, expanded concept of art and artist, that becomes more and more transdisciplinary, and that naturally includes the applied arts in addition to areas of creativity and the sciences.

This book wants to give initial orientation, to illustrate contexts and to stimulate further deepening. It is based upon the research results and conceptual thoughts of the major exhibition on the history of the international art exhibition "The Myth of documenta – Arnold Bode and his Heirs", that was shown in Beijing in 2017.



Transformation: View of the Museum
Fridericianum with art by Bertram Wegel,
Ben Vautier, KP Brehmer and
Haus-Rucker-Co, documenta 6, 1972



Anything Goes: Roman Signer, "Untitled"
(performance), documenta 8, 1987



Global Discourse: Thomas Hirschhorn, "Bataille Monument",
Documenta 11, 1997

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