



# THE DALLAS PAVILION: CONTEMPORARY ART AND URBAN IDENTITY

Michael Corris and Jaspar Joseph-Lester

*In the following statement, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Michael Corris lay out the intentions of their project for the Dallas Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. By contrast with the national pavilions for which the Biennale is renowned, this pavilion represented a city, and was published in the form of a book rather than temporarily staged on the interior of a building. Available to visitors from a stall placed just outside the American pavilion in the Giardini (and now available here as well, by permission of the publishers), this little book is a curated selection of works and texts, intervening within the Biennale's official structure of curated national pavilions. It colourfully surveys the expansive art world of Dallas' artists, critics, curators, collectors, galleries, museums and educators, while raising questions about contemporary urban identity vis-à-vis an aging architectural apparatus such as Venice's international art exposition.*

Keywords: pavilion, Dallas, city, identity, Venice Biennale, collaboration, contemporary art.

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## The Dallas Pavilion: Contemporary Art and Urban Identity

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2013w12jilmc>

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## Abstract

*In the following statement, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Michael Corris lay out the intentions of their project for the Dallas Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. By contrast with the national pavilions for which the Biennale is renowned, this pavilion represented a city, and was published in the form of a book rather than temporarily staged on the interior of a building. Available to visitors from a stall placed just outside the American pavilion in the Giardini (and now available here as well, by permission of the publishers), this little book is a curated selection of works and texts, intervening within the Biennale's official structure of curated national pavilions. It colourfully surveys the expansive art world of Dallas' artists, critics, curators, collectors, galleries, museums and educators, while raising questions about contemporary urban identity vis-à-vis an aging architectural apparatus such as Venice's international art exposition.*

📌 Every world is capable of producing its own world within itself 📌

Alain Badiou, *The Logic of Worlds*

<http://openartsjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/supplement-corris-joseph-lester-dallaspavilion.pdf>

In every city there are a number of worlds. These worlds exist side by side yet operate under very different conditions; they serve different economies, demographics and politics. Perhaps most importantly, each of these worlds produces its own *truth* about art. With this in mind let us propose a pavilion that can contain a cross section of art worlds, a pavilion where the city is experienced through the material spaces and conceptual structures that shape our understanding of what art can be.

In April 2011, we began to explore the idea of curating a city pavilion for Dallas. The venue for this substantial exhibition would be the 2013 Venice Biennale. Needless to say, the starting point for this long-term curatorial project was not the art object, its maker, or even a particular theme for an exhibition. In contrast to the traditional national pavilions that

appear in Venice every two years, this exhibition would be a city pavilion that would take the material form of a book.

Our goal was to provide a preliminary inventory of the material and conceptual conditions nurturing contemporary art in Dallas. The Dallas Pavilion was therefore required to display autonomous locations in addition to the urban mythology, power dynamics and complex social relations that give the city its particular identity.

For two years the Dallas Pavilion developed through dialogue with a group of Dallas based artists, curators, designers and writers. We began by looking at ways to curate a snapshot of events, locations and situations that influence the way art is conceived and experienced across the city. The aim was not to produce a guide or index of the Dallas art scene but rather to reflect on both the abstract and physical structures that help to sustain the cultural life of the city.

The term *Dallas art space* was left open to interpretation; nominations included motorway intersections, cars, lecture theatres, exhibitions, events, shopping centres, offices, video festivals, galleries (past, present and temporary), museums, private art collections and unrealised proposals for large-scale land art projects. From the outset the Dallas Pavilion was intended to stand as an imaginative cross-section of the many art worlds that exist within the context of a single city.

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The first pavilion to represent itself as a 'city' was The Manchester Pavilion, which was housed in a fully functioning bar in the Dorsuduro district of Venice, 2003. Not only was this pavilion a place for discussion and late night drinking, the project successfully reminded people that Manchester is a centre for contemporary art production. Similarly, The Sheffield Pavilion (2007) attached itself to Bar Margaret Duchamp, Campo Santa Margherita, only here the pavilion took the form of a book, which was given out to visitors to the Biennale for the duration of the press week.

This small series of city or location-specific interpretations of national pavilions informed some of the thinking around Project Biennale (2009), a curatorial initiative guided by Amanda Beech, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Matthew Poole which grew out of discussions, seminars and meetings established across three groups of postgraduate Curating and Fine Art students from Chelsea College of Art (London) The University of Essex and Sheffield Hallam University.

While Project Biennale was not city or region specific, it was similarly concerned with the problem of the purpose and place of curatorial authorship.

However, rather than focusing only on the Venice Biennale, the publication resulting from this curatorial initiative took up the broader question of the increase of large-scale time-based curatorial events and their relation to the interests of capital. In other words, the Venice Biennale provided the project with a platform for exploring the paradoxical and problematic connection between critique and capital, corporate investment and national identity, and how these often opposing forces determine our experience of art.

The Dallas Pavilion builds on the work of previous city or location-specific interpretations of the pavilion, on various projects that treat the book as an exhibition space. Most importantly though, this pavilion actively plays on the way local identities are exported as a global brand. The work exhibited in the pages of this 'pavilion' both affirms and opposes a dominant image of Dallas. We may be seduced by the big sky, bling fashion and luxury department stores but we know very well that this image of Dallas culture is highly constructed, commercial and deeply conservative.

How then do the various art spaces that help to determine the production of contemporary art function critically in 'Big D'? What is the relation between the pervasive global image of the city and the local art spaces that produce culture? How is location embedded in the thinking and creative output of Dallas artists, curators, educators, museum directors and critics? These questions have emerged as the overriding concerns that shape this printed pavilion. Each of the sections in the book speaks of the complex relations between the machines of culture that operate throughout the city and the various *truths* they produce about art.

\* \* \*

Working against the grain of an entrenched 'authenticity' that denies society its rightful social glue, part 2 of the Dallas Pavilion stages conversations among interlocutors whom only rarely speak to each other yet have a world in common. Whatever the participants choose to install, so as to grace the wide whitewashed space of the Kirk Hopper Gallery will function as a backdrop to an intense program of debate.

The creation of a platform for dialogue is hardly a radical gesture in the context of an international biennial exhibition. For the artists, critics and exhibition organisers of the city of Dallas, however, the

instantiation of artistic practice based on collaboration and public discourse may very well be novel and transformative.

### Participants

CADD Art Lab, CentralTrak, Conduit Gallery: The Project Room, The Dallas Cowboys Stadium, The Dallas Museums of Art, Dick Higgins Gallery, DFW Airport, Free Museum of Dallas, Make Art with Purpose (MAP), The Tuesday Evening Lecture Series, NorthPark Shopping Center, RE gallery + studio, The Reading Room, Small Dog Studio, Tending (Blue), Terri Thornton's studio, Transmission Annual, Dallas VideoFest, West Dallas Community Centers, Barry Whistler Gallery, 301 Toronto Street, 337 Singleton Boulevard, 500X Gallery.



Figure 11.1: The Dallas Pavilion presented at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.  
Courtesy of Jaspar Joseph-Lester & Michael Corris.



Figure 11.2: The Dallas Pavilion presented at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013.  
Courtesy of Jaspar Joseph-Lester & Michael Corris.



Figure 11.3: The Dallas Pavilion presented at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. Courtesy of Jaspar Joseph-Lester & Michael Corris.