

# To Irene Hofmann

Irene Hofmann  
Santa Fe, USA

San Francisco, USA  
14 October 2014

Dear Irene

Thanks for joining us in Liverpool. I'm sorry your visit had to be brief. It was good that you also got to see A Needle Walks Into a Haystack. Personally, I'm happy to have met you, having now failed to make it to Santa Fe this past weekend. Thank you and Joanne for that invitation. I'm keen to join, at the next stage, the national conversation she's convening.

It was valuable for the group to hear you speak about the challenges of the SITE Santa Fe biennial — in the form that you inherited: the challenge posed by the disenchantment in the city; the challenge of how to tie a biennial (that brings national and international visitors) to ongoing, year-round programming that serves the local scene; that the institution was seen as elitist, especially by local artists; the discontinuity that had resulted out of a succession of *auteur*-ish guest curators producing biennial editions that celebrate their own tastes (okay, these all are my words not yours).

It was bold of you to cancel the first scheduled biennial after you took up your post. Obviously, you had replacement programming to fill the gap, but still. There are times when it's worth questioning the institutional obligation to **produce** — I was talking about this with Osvaldo Sanchez not long ago; refusing that obligation is central to the reinvention of inSite.

It's very interesting to those of us involved with Liverpool to understand how much your rethinking of the biennial in Santa Fe has dealt with matters of time and place. There's the need for curators to spend more time in the city, to move there, or stay for extended periods there, to build connections with the locality. Allied to this, there's the commitment to research — which necessarily demands a different temporality. I guess we're all saying that research and community cannot be accommodated by the once-every-two-years tempo of the regular biennial.

I cannot speak for others, but your approach to the question of place seems especially bold, perhaps even too much so: to adopt a geographic category, The Americas, as a multi-year, multi-edition theme. I can grasp part-way (since I'm not familiar with the place) what you're saying about Santa Fe as a microcosm of the rest of the US and the story of the Americas. And 'The Americas' is a capacious category, to be sure. I guess I recoil a little from the adoption of a territory as a theme. Or perhaps I'm just theme-averse. That's a common condition nowadays. I'd be interested to ask, however, how close, for you, is the Pan-American idea (in its structure and porosity) to the Pan-African idea?

I also want to ask you more about your micro-grants initiative 'Spread', its manifestation as social events in Santa Fe, and how local artists participate in it.

In every way, Irene, it was good to have you here. We talk a lot about the affinities that the Liverpool Biennial might have to other parts of the world, what relationships we should nurture. It's clear that we share many aspects of your vision.

Someone at **The Resident** said that there may be around 200 biennials, but they all have essentially the same mission statement. How to change that? Does it matter?

Best wishes

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