documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH is a non-profit organization supported and funded by the City of Kassel and the State of Hesse, as well as by the German Federal Cultural Foundation. documenta is considered the world's largest and most prestigious exhibition of contemporary art. Over 905,000 visitors came to Kassel for dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012. documenta 14 will be held from 10 June to 17 September 2017.

Each documenta takes its character from the ideas and concept of its Artistic Director, and is therefore not only a forum for current trends in contemporary art, but a place where innovative and standards-setting exhibition concepts are trialed. In each edition, documenta has played a leading role in taking the international discourse about art in new directions. Over the past decades, documenta has established itself as an institution that goes far beyond a survey of what is currently happening, inviting the attention of the international art world every five years for this “museum of 100 days.” The discourse and the dynamics of the discussion surrounding each documenta reflects and challenges the expectations of society about art.

documenta 14, Kassel: Learning from Athens

On October 6, 2014, a symposium titled “documenta 14, Kassel: Learning from Athens” was held at Kunsthochschule (Academy of Fine Arts) in Kassel, Germany, at the invitation of the academy. Organized by the team of documenta 14, and led by Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk, the symposium presented key members of the next documenta organization, as well as discussed essential ideas and thematic concerns of the exhibition project as a whole, scheduled to take place in 2017.

The city of Kassel has been the host of documenta since its inception in 1955. Likewise, over the past thirteen editions, documenta has served as host to many artists and cultural practitioners from around the globe. But, ultimately, this position of host—with all the privileges involved—appears to be no longer tenable and begs to be questioned, if only temporarily. To this end, Szymczyk introduced documenta 14’s planned twofold structure: In 2017, documenta 14 will establish a second site—Athens—bringing Kassel and the Greek capital onto equal footing as the two locations of the exhibition. Thus documenta’s undisputed position as host will be abandoned for another role, that of guest, in Athens.

Szymczyk noted that the main lines of thinking behind this move are manifold. They have to do with the current social and political situation both in Europe and globally, which motivates artistic action. Further, they indicate the need to embody in documenta 14 the palpable tension between the North and the South as it is reflected, articulated, and interpreted in contemporary cultural production. The challenge involves avoiding the traps of binary logic, while resonating with changing realities. To that end, instead of the singular spectacle, with its clearly designated location and temporal order, typical for great international exhibitions, documenta 14 will comprise two iterations set in dynamic balance in space and time.

The distance between Kassel and Athens will fundamentally alter the visitors’ experience of documenta 14. A feeling of loss and longing brought about by geographic and mental displacement created by two distant iterations of the exhibition might change the visitors’ perception of the show, working against the idea of rootedness and countering the widespread, normative assumption that such an exhibition must sustain the unity of action, place, and time.

Challenging this state of things, documenta 14 will attempt to encompass a multitude of voices in, between, and beyond the two cities where it is situated, reaching beyond the European context from the vantage point of the Mediterranean metropolis, where Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia
the vantage point of the Mediterranean metropolis, where Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia face each other. The diverse and diverging locations and socioeconomic circumstances of Kassel and Athens will come to bear on the very process of creation of the exhibitions, while inspiring and determining its individual works of art. For documenta 14, the participating artists will be invited to think and produce within the dynamic between these two cities.

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