NEW ART examiner

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The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading this independent journal of art criticism.
If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.
The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.
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The Attentive Artist

Each year, farmers in the town of Inakadate in Aomori prefecture create works of crop art by growing a little purple and yellow-leafed kodaimai rice along with their local green-leafed tsugaru-roman variety. This year's creation -- a pair of grassy reproductions of famous woodblock prints from Hokusai's 36 Views of Mount Fuji -- has begun to appear (above). It will be visible until the rice is harvested in September.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

Daniel Benshana is the European editor of the *New Art Examiner*, author of many children's books and sometime poet. He runs www.footstepsbooks.com.

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Christian Hain studied philosophy and literature in Germany before moving to Paris for a postgraduate course in art history/art market, then working in a gallery and as an independent curator/art dealer. Since returning to his native Germany, he's been editing the bilingual blog www.wartsmagazine.com

Pabloe Halguera is an artist, performer, author, and educator. From 2007 to 2020 he was Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

Tiffany Jenkins is a writer, author and broadcaster. Her next book *Strangers and Intimates: The Rise and Fall of Private Life* – will be published in 2023 by Picador. She is also the author of the critically acclaimed *Keeping Their Marbles: How the Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums and Why They Should Stay There* ; reviewed in the Sunday Times as "an outstanding achievement, clear-headed, wide-ranging and incisive." https://tiffanyjenkinsinfo.com

Susana Gomez Lain is a practicing artist and lawyer or vice versa, in her works she tries to conciliate both worlds using concepts and experiences extracted from her daily study and practice, using art as a legal language and weapon to subtly voice universal human concerns and dilemmas, trying to bring a ray of light wherever she finds darkness.

Miklos Legrady is a visual artist, writer, anti-hero and protagonist who's expecting trouble. He steps out of the art world's blind spot, uncovering myths and deconstructing fictions. He has a B.Sc. in visual studies workshop, Rochester, N.Y and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

Liviana Martin was born in Northern Italy and lives in Milan. She has a degree in Philosophy and she taught for many years. She is keen on ancient and contemporary art, because she is absolutely confident that " the beauty will save the world".

Matthew Nesvet PhD, is an anthropologist and journalist. He is also Assistant Professor at Miami Dade College and Research Scientist at Indiana University School of Medicine. Find more of his writing at MattNesvet.com or follow him on Twitter or Academia.edu @Mattnesvet.

Frances Oliver has published seven works of fiction and self-published three memoirs. She was born in Vienna, grew up and married in the USA, and has since lived and travelled in a number of countries. After her husband's death she and their daughter settled in Cornwall, where she devotes much time to environmental campaigns.

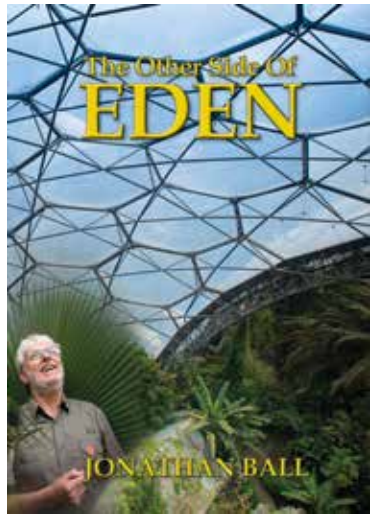
Letters

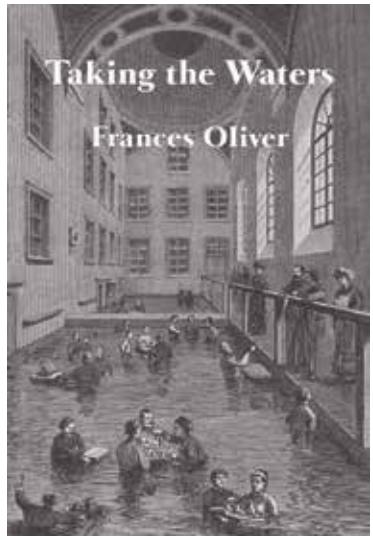
The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing:

Editor,
The problem of global homogeneity in art history is a the result of global networking made possible through the internet. With the rapid spread of knowledge came the rapid spread of embedded errors and vested interests, limiting variety.
R.A. Fischer is the father of contemporary statistics. He wrote that the goal of scholarship is an advance in human knowledge, which sometimes occurs but this is awkward and feelings get hurt. Such steps often require corrections to ideas some consider as personal territory and comfort zone; the old guard cling tenaciously to errors they've taught for decades.
As a result Max Plank wrote that knowledge advances one funeral at a time scholars often find themselves ostracized when publishing inconvenient truths. Diversity can be saved through an intellectual rigour, since diversity is limited by vested interests
Miklos Legrady 04/07/2022

Envoi Derek Guthrie

Editor,
I want to express my eternal gratitude to Derek, who was one of the first editors to appreciate my work and give me a voice through publication in the New Art Examiner, back in 2017. Derek is a genius, he is a brilliant man. We spoke on Skype occasionally, he had good suggestions I was always impressed. Derek and Daniel came to visit me in Canada when they did their U.S. tour 5-6 years ago, Derek impressed me as much in the flesh as he did in print on screen. Derek Guthrie is one of the brilliant men of our time, he did a lot of good for a lot of people.
Miklos Legrady 04/07/2022





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or write an email to

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QUOTE of the MONTH:

"The basic unit for contemporary art is not the idea, but the analysis of, and extension of, sensations."

Susan Sontag

NEW ART examiner CiC

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EDITORIAL

Artists work within a series of communities. Even those at the high end of the monetary power of the art system, meet and work for plutocrats, old aristocratic families and corporations while being protected from everyone else by agents and various offices.

Those who work in the regions and towns of their countries grow their base from within their living spaces, where buyers enjoy the frissance of hanging on their walls someone who is 'known' because if three people talk about you, to those three people you are famous.

This idea of known is interesting. Because the buyers themselves are working within their communities and they will see work on the walls of their friends, hear of work or up-coming artists at their gatherings in the same ways wherever those friends and gatherings take place with whichever segment of society.

'I knew *** before (he or she) was famous' is a badge of insight worn by many art collectors. Then again, meeting the artist is a talking-point. Describing them, their studio, repeating their jokes, quoting them … all these elements of knowledge are community intensive and speak not only of the community you are working within, but your place in it. And the community and the artist manipulate each other.

The work is nowhere as independent opinion never goes beyond 'I liked his other pieces' 'I own some of her drawings' 'I would buy that if it wasn't sold already' 'This is all very different from her work two years ago' … and so on. You will not hear, except in very refined and informed company, discussions of where the artist fits in art history. You will hear how well-respected they are in their region/city and how they accord or otherwise to the taste of the individual talking.

This is alright, artists have to live somewhere and in olden days people travelled to cities to meet those artists but today artists are itinerant and you can meet them on their tours and through their social media accounts. But many regional artists get stuck where their income exists like all other employed people, and many high-end artists only go where the high-end money is.

While artists have to live, art was never a capitalist venture, but it has become one. Just as nature was evolved and never a capitalist venture but has been made into one, where it does not fit and the cracks and breaking points of that are as real and as dangerous as those for the artists.

Daniel Benshana

SPEAKEASY

photo: Chris Cook

Each issue, the *New Art Examiner* invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

Tiffany Jenkins is a writer, author and broadcaster. Her next book Strangers and Intimates: The Rise and Fall of Private Life – will be published in 2023 by Picador. She is also the author of the critically acclaimed *Keeping Their Marbles: How the Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums and Why They Should Stay There* ; reviewed in the Sunday Times as "an outstanding achievement, clear-headed, wide-ranging and incisive."

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The Cost of Culture

The Tate should take BP's money—and ask for more

Protests about the gallery's lack of transparency concerning the energy company's sponsorship miss the point of how big business and the arts interact.

Last September, more than 100 members of the art collective Liberate Tate, founded in 2010, filed into the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, flung open a 64-metre square of black cloth, and held it aloft for two hours in a performance intended as a reinterpretation of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*. This political protest made reference to the Tate's use of black marks in redacting information in minutes from an internal meeting about its sponsorship deal with the energy company BP (formerly British Petroleum), which the gallery is being asked to disclose after legal action brought by the group.

It was one of a series of artistic responses accompanying a complex legal battle to compel the Tate to reveal details of its dealings with BP. Lasting nearly three years so far, the machinations have involved a Freedom of Information (FoI) request; a response to that request from the Tate; a complaint to the information commissioner that the response was not adequate; responses, called decision notices, from the information commission to the complaint, and an appeal against the decision notices.

The case reached a climax on 22 December 2014, when a tribunal ruled that the museum must divulge sponsorship figures dating from 1990 to 2006; but also that the museum did not have to publish as much of the minutes as stated in one of the decision notices. In other words, some of the black squares might stay. The Tate was considering whether to appeal against the decision as we went to press.

Long-running campaign

The case began in 2012 when the environmental campaigner Glen Tarman, supported by Liberate Tate, subjected the Tate to FoI requests to reveal the total sponsorship the gallery had received from BP for each of the previous 23 years; minutes from ethics committee meetings where the renewal of the sponsorship agreement had been discussed and approved; and any requests BP may have made for confidentiality. London's National Portrait Gallery, National Gallery and the Natural History Museum all received similar FoI requests and published the amounts they received. But the Tate dragged its heels, citing various legal exemptions, withholding the figures and blacking out parts of the documents, publishing only the confidentiality cause and a list of dates for when the ethics committee met.

By applying pressure on the Tate and other institutions the ambition of campaigners is to bring to an end the funding of the arts by oil companies. Such sponsorship benefits the corporations, providing them with a veneer of respectability, while they are busy trashing the planet, activists argue; it is "greenwashing". But cutting such funds is an alarming aim—one that ignores the realities of funding and poses a danger to the arts.

Art thrives on the money of the rich, the immoral and the powerful. The Medici banking family was partly responsible for the flourishing of Renaissance Florence, supporting some of the greatest artists who have lived. Without the money of these wealthy men and their enemies the Borgias, the paintings and sculptures of Michelangelo, Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci might never have been created. The Guggenheims became philanthropists after

running mining interests that would, conceivably, today be considered criminal. Yet the Guggenheim museums benefit every single visitor.

That is not to suggest that every museum is funded by 'dirty' money, more that it is difficult to identify money that is good and clean and money that is not. BP is a legitimate company and we all use oil. We drive cars, sit in houses and offices warmed by central heating and lit with electricity. And art needs lots of money, regardless of whether it's from the Holy See, Big Oil or the state. If it is from a legal corporation, the arts should take the money, especially in this economic climate.

This is not simply about pocketing the cash and running. The demand made was that the Tate should reveal all details about a sponsorship deal—all the dollars and cents—and minutes from internal meetings. Lawyers working for the museum argued that it should be exempt from revealing the funds because it was information provided in confidence and could be prejudicial to commercial interests. They argued that withholding information from the minutes was supportable because disclosure would inhibit provision of free and frank advice, and that it could be a threat to public safety. Most of these are arguments are sensible; the final one is questionable.

Secrecy is justified

There are good reasons why the Tate and others should not have to reveal every penny of financial arrangements: sponsorship deals are commercial. As all fundraisers know, you ask for more than you get and this requires a certain degree of smoke and mirrors. It is conceivable, for example, that the Tate does not want to reveal how much it receives because it is not quite as much as other sponsors—and future ones—think. This is what campaigners believe. Liberate Tate used available information to estimate that the Tate receives from BP about £500,000 a year—only 0.3% of Tate's overall operating budget. They argue that this shows oil money is not as essential as is suggested. But does it? After all, every penny counts. The museum should take the money and ask for more. The broader obsession with transparency fails to recognise that withholding information can be beneficial, especially in relation to the request that the Tate publish minutes from meetings. Internal discussion, where people can speak their minds freely without fearing everyone will find out what they said, is vital to coming to informed decisions. Those with a zeal for openness need to recognise that demands to show everything can undercut essential deliberation.

Fair deal

The Tate also turned to questionable arguments to justify keeping information out of the public domain. Lawyers for the museum argued that revealing information from the minutes could cause further protest, thus posing a threat to health and safety—citing the danger of accidental slips in the course of any protest. This is a daft and opportunistic argument, one that, if deemed legitimate in one instance, could be used against museums on other occasions to shut down controversial exhibitions. Protest is legitimate, whether you agree with the agitators or not.

There is no doubt that all funders want something for their money and it is crucial that they do not interfere in curatorial decisions—museums must be fiercely independent on this front. It is therefore sensible to draw on a mix of sources—public and private—so as not to become overly dependent on any single one. But museums should accept all cheques—for large or small sums. Let the sponsors have their logos brandished about and let them have their fancy parties in the museum's galleries; and by all means flatter their egos and be effusive in thanking them: they deserve it.

Beautiful Eccentrics

Pablo Halguera

BARROQUISMOS: CONCEPTUAL READINGS OF THE 17TH CENTURY.

Last week I was in Puebla to do research for a museum project. Puebla is very dear to my heart – a city where my mother grew up, and where I visited frequently as a child when my father travelled for business there. Many important artists and writers were born and worked in Puebla; the only official avant-garde movement in Mexico, Estridentismo, published its second manifesto there. It is not only a culinary capital but also one of the geographic areas where the Baroque in Latin America reached its most spectacular climax – in buildings like the Capilla del Rosario and Santa María Tonantzintla in Cholula.

I thus was very interested to visit, for the first time, the Museo Internacional del Barroco, which opened in 2016. The handsome building was commissioned by the state government to Japanese starchitect Toyo Ito with an official budget of 37 million dollars (although that seems highly unlikely; unofficial figures put it at a much higher cost, up to the hundreds of millions). The massive 18,000 sq. meter complex, nearing the Guggenheim Bilbao's 24,000, undoubtedly had great aspirations.

When I and a colleague entered we were the only visitors in the entire museum. There were a dozen eagle-eyed guards around us, monitoring our every movement, as well as cleaning staff incessantly swiping the already squeaky-clean marble floors, giving the whole museum a general fragrance of Ajax Pino. With counted exceptions, the vast majority of the collection is 'borrowed' – mainly aggregated out of loans from other local colonial art museums and in some instances with rented works from European museums, likely (I suspect) at a great cost to Poblano taxpayers. I was told the museum had no education department, and my research did not find any evidence of education programs. The interiors resemble, more than a museum, a mall in suburban New Jersey, and the exhibitions seem as if designed by an advertising agency that specializes in designing automotive trade shows – only featuring works of Cristóbal de Villalpando. It is the first museum I have visited in my life where I felt that the art works were used as props.

The contemporary exhibitions, supposedly engaging with the baroque aesthetic, include a ceramic solo show by an artist who makes pieces such as a cookie-jar shaped Talavera ceramic bear with an erection and the bust, a singing woman with a bird atop her head.

Adriana Varejão: Azulejaria De Tapete em Carne Viva*' (Carpet-Style Tilework in Live Flesh), 1999*
Oil, foam, aluminum, wood and canvas
Photo: Lehman Maupin

The first piece one encounters in the museum lobby is a plaster cast copy: a monumental, 13-foot equestrian sculpture of Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg and Duke of Prussia whose original one can see in Berlin. Which made me think: if one is going to go as low as to exhibit a plaster copy, why not just at least pick the best, like Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*? But the selection of an all-powerful European ruler might psychologically make sense when one learns how this museum came to be. It was commissioned by Governor Rafael Moreno Valle (who tragically died in a helicopter accident a year after the museum opened). The current government, with a leader from a different political party, have had no choice but to honor the burdensome loan contracts created by the previous administration, and they are not happy about it. Just last month at a

press conference the current governor called the building 'magical but cursed', and added that they will turn it into a "virtual" museum given that "it costs too much to have real artworks in it" (a statement by which I assume one will be able to attend this palatial building to look at flat screens and websites). At present, the museum evokes anything baroque, it primarily is the period's cult of extravagant festivities and displays (i.e. a lavish museum) for the pleasure of an absolute monarch (i.e.. the governor or Puebla). It's a museum built for a single viewer who is now deceased.

Political vanity projects aside, the museum stimulated in my mind the question of how we could pursue a research project (museum or otherwise) focusing on the legacy of baroque aesthetic in contemporary art.

The interest in the Baroque in contemporary art has always been ongoing and multivaried, both in Latin America and elsewhere. The examples abound. Recently, in 2018, Luc Tuymans curated a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp that engaged with the high-drama and tenebrism of the Baroque, in particular the legacy that pertains to Flanders.

Thinking back to Latin America, in 2000 Elizabeth Armstrong and the late curator Victor Zamudio-Taylor curated the important exhibition *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art*, which sought to dispense with the many clichés associated with the period and feature works by artists who conceptually connected with its painting tradition (like Yishai Jusidman) or its decorative arts one (like Adriana Varejão).

I asked Armstrong to reflect back regarding that project to share the perspective they took on the baroque. I quote her response:

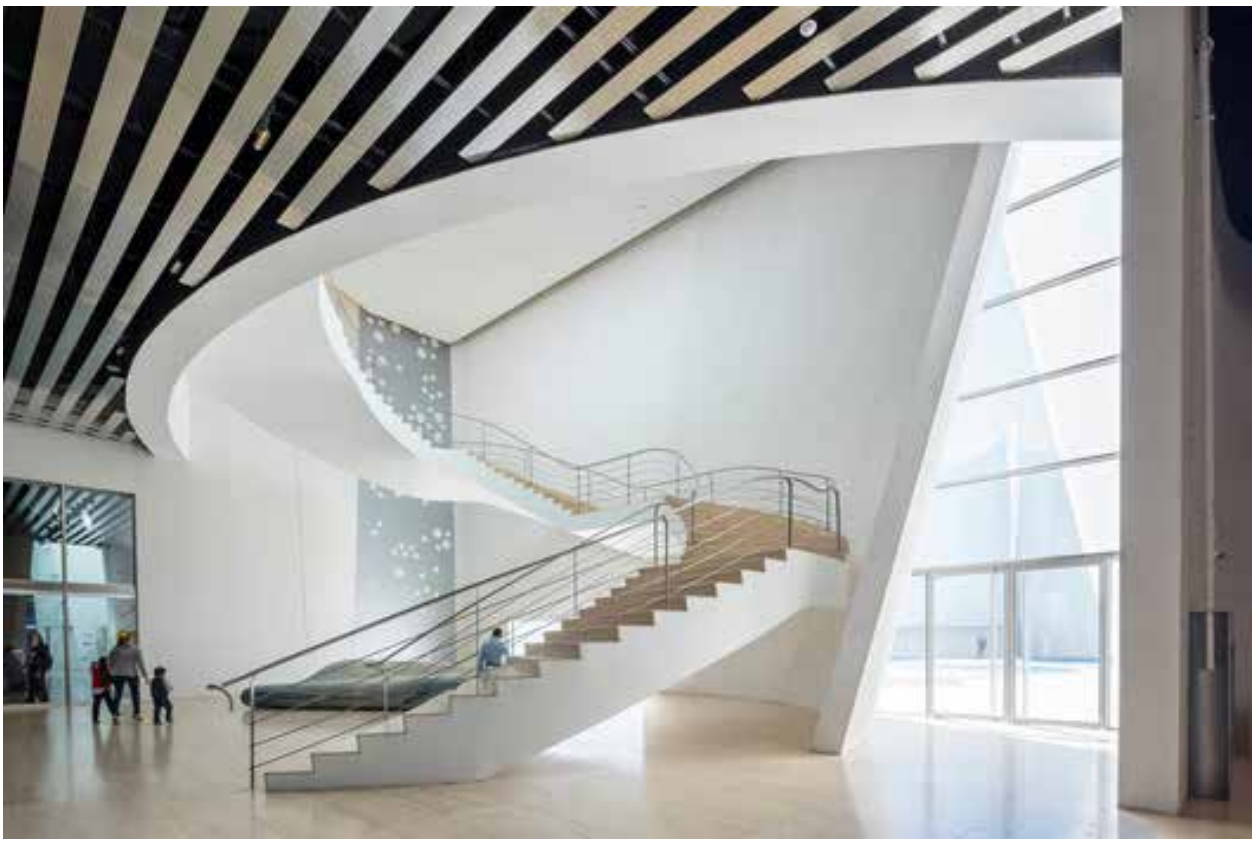
"When I first started talking about contemporary Latin American art with a group of scholars in the field (which is how I met Victor), it was to take a fresh look at Latin American artists working outside of the stereotypes that were commonly used at the time such as Magic Realism and the Baroque. In the 1990s, my advisors believed these two movements were constantly evoked to define – and limit – modern and contemporary Latin American art. But we were basically talking about "style" and aesthetics.

Rather than overlooking the definition of a baroque aesthetic, I think it's fairer to say that we became much more interested in the globalizing impulses that emerged in Latin America in tandem with its colonization (during the period of the Baroque). And that hybridity is what I began to see as a strong throughline that transcended the stylistic stereotypes of the baroque used about Latin American art.

Capilla del Rosario*, Puebla*
Wiki Commons

Even when it involved painting, as in the case of Adriana Varejão, it had a conceptual element that referred to colonization and related cultural clashes. Revisiting the Baroque period in Latin American art led us to the way in which colonial subjects who became artists and artisans began to create new hybrid forms based on cultural cannibalism and appropriation."

Armstrong adds: "we were responding to the way that North American and European art historians and contemporary critics relied on these stereotypes about Latin American art – which, to some extent, had become derogatory clichés. For example, some of the most prominent Latin American artists of the



Museo Internacional del Barroco, interior courtyard

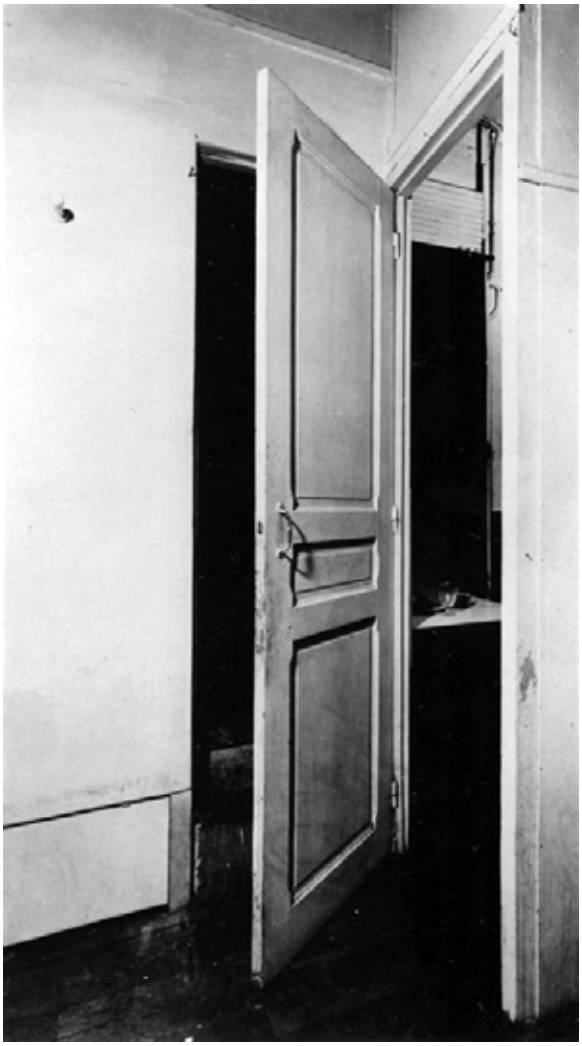
period were Julio Galán and Beatriz Milhazes. I have great respect for each, and their respective aesthetics were very much in evidence at this year's Venice Biennale. Leonora Carrington comes to mind, whose work was often described as 'baroque' or 'magic realist' and which was unpopular for so long. That work and those styles are popular once again, as witnessed by the current Venice Biennale.

Going beyond Latin America and considering the present moment in art, it can still be argued that the clichés that Armstrong and Zamudio-Taylor were questioning still persist to this day: in general when we use the term baroque to define certain art projects we still think of it in fairly formal narrow terms, mostly referring to elaborate, over-the-top, or heavily ornamented works. But the aesthetic of the Baroque is generally misunderstood and in reality it is much more complex; in many ways it laid the foundation for important aspects of modern art.

It has often been observed that the mathematical/symmetrical approach with a limited set of elements and formulas in composition that characterizes 20th century minimalist music can find its precursor in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach in the late Baroque period. Bach alone is a fascinating subject to explore as a topic for contemporary art. One of Bach's many fans was no other than Sol LeWitt, who often listened to Bach in his studio (he had a library of about 4,000 recordings). In a recent exhibition drawing of this relationship at the Williams College of Art, the curator writes: 'Like Bach, LeWitt found extraordinary richness in systematic formal logic, developing complex structures out of the simplest elements such as a two-by-two grid with lines in four directions.'

Following on Bach's underlying compositional principles and approaches, we might find foundational ideas for the art we make today: for example, when one considers Bach's breathtaking *Crab Canon* from 1747 (a vignette palindromic composition where the second voice is a perfectly inverted version of the first voice and they mirror each other as in a perfectly shaped Möbius strip) how can one not see this as an artistic precedent for conceptual art?

It might also be interesting to consider that 300 years before conceptualism emerged, a Spanish literary movement named conceptismo (primarily represented by Francisco de Quevedo) competed with a more specific and even more erudite variant of it, 'culteranismo', whose main representative was Luis



Marcel Duchamp, Door: 11, Rue Larrey, *1927*

Miguel Cabrera: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *1750*

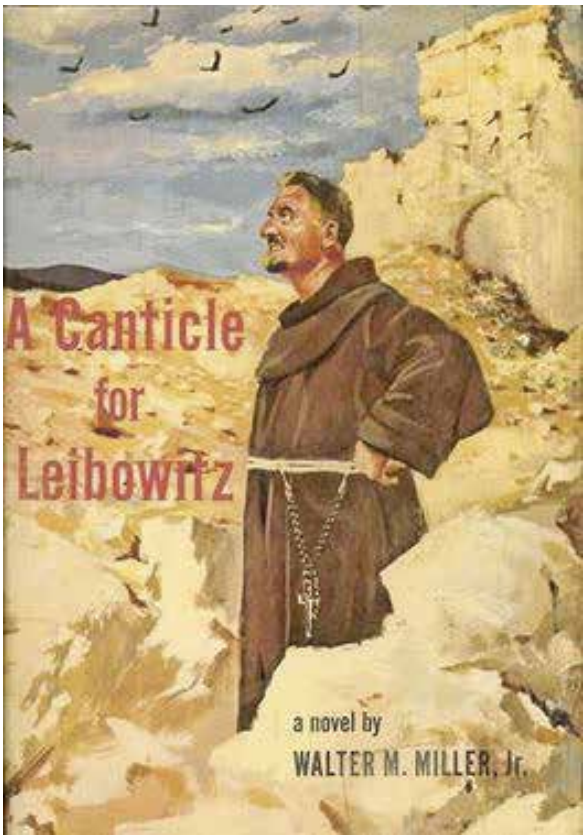
de Góngora. Baltazar Gracián defined conceptismo as 'an act of understanding that expresses the correspondence between objects'.

Are the terms conceptualism and conceptism merely a coincidence? The immediate answer might be yes, but when one considers Duchampian visual puns, he is operating with the meaning of words and with the ingenious reimagining between them, for instance *Fresh Widow,* which is a variation of an ellipsis – a devise often used by Quevedo and others of the period.

Speaking of Duchamp, French wi(n)dows and other home furnishings, I probably would have never thought about possible connections between conceptual art and the 17th century, had I not seen an intriguing image in the last page of Alexander Roob's *Alchemy and Mysticism* (published by Taschen in 1996) a book that has been popular over decades as a visual reference of Hermetic imagery for artists worldwide. Roob chose to include Duchamp's *Door: 11, rue Larrey* - seemingly not so much of an argument but a provocation, one to incite us to think about the hermetic elements of surrealism (thinking back of Gracián's definition of the correspondence between objects, it might not be hard to think also of Comte de Lautreamont's almost parallel definition of surrealism as "the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table."

WELCOME TO DYSTOPIA

Frances Oliver

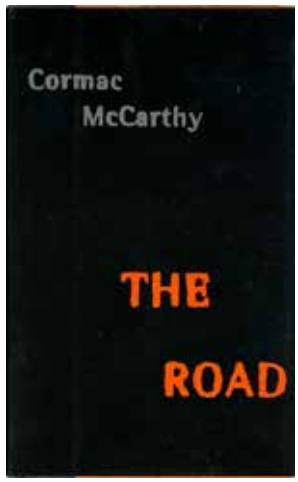


'Dystopia' is a word that only began appearing in dictionaries in 1868. Before that there was only 'Utopia' which came into the language with Sir Thomas More's book of that name, in 1551. 'Utopia' meant "an imaginary ideal place, enjoying a perfect, legal, social and political system".

It is hard to think of any recently written Utopia. Dystopia abounds, inspired by the horrors of modern war and modern tyranny, the inhumanity and alienation of industrial civilization, the fear of nuclear annihilation, the new scientific and psychological techniques for government control – and now of course the ecological catastrophe that looms ever closer with little hope of real action on the warnings which date back half a century!

Much dystopic writing appears in science fiction. Huxley's *Brave New World* is probably the most famous example. This was published in 1932 and now seems remarkably prescient; a society of test tube babies, sex for pleasure only, happiness drugs, popular entertainment on tap, and skillfully directed propaganda that keep everyone unquestioning and content with the social status for which he or she was test-tube bred. Huxely's *Brave New World* might be said to fit definitions of both Utopia and Dystopia. It is a society that functions perfectly without conflict; but also a society in which all the freedom, variety, mobility, independence of spirit, creativity and thought a previous age treasured have disappeared.

After Huxley, H.G. Wells, E.M. Forster, George Orwell and Ray Bradbury amongst others who also wrote stories of advanced dystopic societies, the atomic age has featured dystopias that regress; in which apocalypse or revolution end present civilization; where humanity, or large parts of it, descend into chaos and anarchy or brutal dictatorship, or both. Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* pictures a post-nuclear medieval dark age, in which once again only monasteries are the repositories of faith and learning, and scientific knowledge is lost; but with monks illuminating the atomic blueprints now regarded as mysterious sacred texts, one fears the se-



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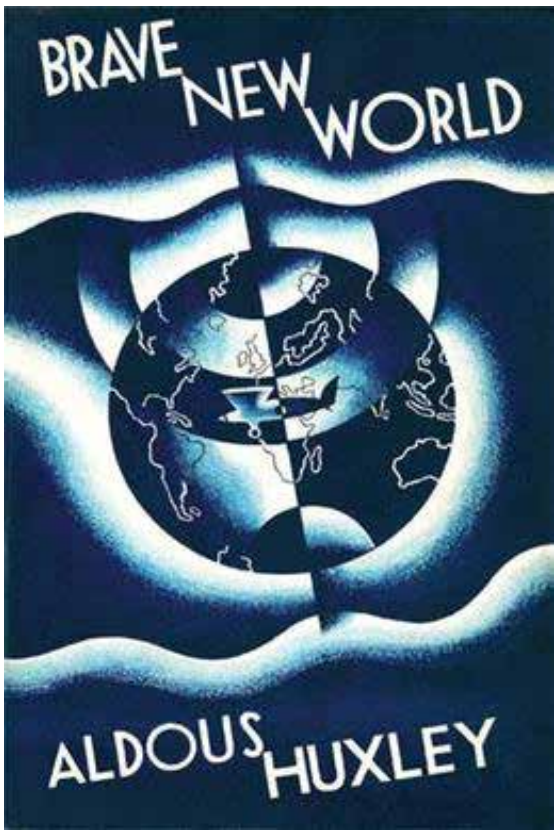
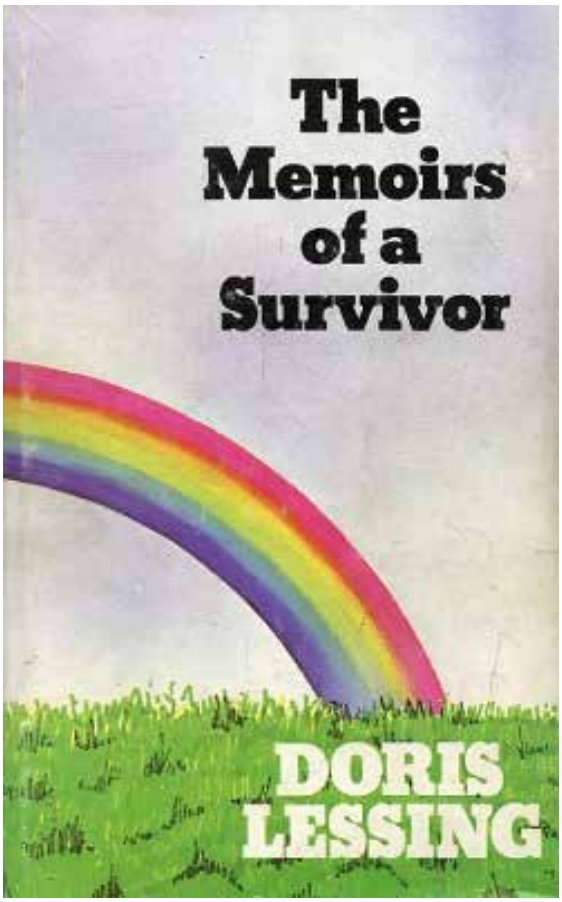




crets of the blueprints will eventually be rediscovered and the doomed 'progress' of humanity begin again. In Robert Merle's *Malevil* we are also in a post-nuclear apocalypse world, with a group of men who, meeting in a historic castle, escaped the blast. They manage to survive but their supplies and crops must be ruthlessly defended with arms. Eventually they make contact with other castles, battles are won, alliances and relationships made, children born again and in the new Middle Ages there are rays of hope.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and its sequel pictures a grim post new-revolution USA where women are selected for breeding and other roles by a theocratic, tyrannical patriarchy. Most terrifying and powerful of all these dystopic books I found Cormac McCarthy's unforgettable *The Road* where civilization has totally collapsed into chaos and anarchy, and murder and cannibalism are rife. A father and his little son journey south where it will be warmer and there are hopes of food. Part of their dangerous and arduous travel is done with the aid of an abandoned supermarket shopping trolley they find, so the collapse is obviously recent and abrupt.

'South' is also the destination of migrants in Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor,* which she described as "an attempt at autobiography". Here the origins of catastrophe are unclear, and there are still functioning, but increasingly helpless, authorities. A sort of normal life continues in the big apartment building where the narrator lives, but the streets are dangerous with marauding bands, supplies are less and less and more and more people choose to leave – for the unknown 'south'. Parts of this book are mystical and surreal; the narrator sometimes walks though a corridor into another dream-like world, from which a young girl is brought out to the everyday world to be in her charge. A vivid and absorbing book; but for me the juxtaposition of dream- and real-world was an uncomfortable and unsatisfactory fit.

In my next article I would like to write about two other dystopias, one recent, John Lanchester's *The Wall,* the other, Richard Jefferies' *Wild England,* late 19th century, but postulating the same origins – a great geographic change, as we now in fact face with the climate crisis, and a similar setting – a country or a world largely lost underwater.

I would be pleased to hear from readers about other dystopias – or Utopias if any can be imagined – they have found moving or convincing for what the future may hold.

Simone Leigh's Sovereignty at the Venice Biennale

Matthew Nesvet

If, as many commentators say, the Venice Biennale is the Olympics of art, the international fair's opening day features, in place of the world's best athletes running through a stadium with torches, a parade of journalists, press assistants, and other curious ticket holders milling about the Giardini, the park grounds in Venice where the permanent national pavilions sit. Though the Biennale will last through summer, the size of the scrum of reporters and members of the public gathered around the artists and curators holding press conferences on the first day of the exhibition, and the different length of the lines to enter each pavilion, offer a rough approximation of the levels of public interest each national exhibit will garner in the days and months to come—and how likely are to win prizes.

New Art Examiner, posted to the front of the United States national pavilion on opening day—a Wednesday morning in late April—waited for the pavilion's press conference to commence and listened as two visitors from France, an older man and woman, exclaimed at the sight they beheld: artist Simone Leigh, representing the United States, had wrapped the neo-Palladian brick building housing the U.S. exhibition in an overflowing thatch roof that runs partway down the sides of the Guggenheim Foundation-owned building. "This looks like Africa, I can't believe it," the female told New Art Examiner, laughing and smiling as she pointed to the Mozambiquan Raffia Palm that adorned the building.

Leigh, who, alongside British artist Sonia Boyce, would days later go on to win a Golden Lion—the art fair's highest award—for her work in the international exhibition, The Milk of Dreams, used wooden pillars and a mostly unseen steel structure to stage the outside of the building in reference to the replica West African structures the French constructed—along with a replica temple at Angor Wat—for the Colonial Exhibitions. These were held in Marseilles in 1922 and—the event Leigh's team cites—Paris in 1931, a year after the U.S. Pavilion opened, all part of a propaganda effort to show off the mission civilisatrice.

Leigh's Façade offers a glimpse of the Biennale and similar fairs' histories of exhibiting colonial dogma and national glory, pointing to how international exhibitions have long celebrated colonial empire and the nation-states that grew up within them. Leigh's façade also calls attention to the ways the Biennale pavilions can add gloss, shine, and order to national projects that have a bloodier pedigree than the green Giardini reveals. It is a subject other national pavilions at the Biennale this year also explore, particularly German artist Maria Eichhorn's excavation of the 1909 Bavarian pavilion building and its 1938 extension by the Nazis.

The Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston collaborated with State Department officials to bring Leigh's work to the U.S. Pavilion. In 2023, much of Leigh's Biennale work will travel from Italy to Boston, where Sovereignty will comprise a major part of the ICA's upcoming Simone Leigh exhibit. Eva Respini, Sovereignty's co-curator and chief curator at the ICA, told New Art Examiner that she and Leigh were already working on what will be Leigh's first-ever museum survey show when, two years ago, Respini proposed Leigh to represent the U.S. at the Biennale. "Thinking it was a longshot" for the 2022 Biennale, when Leigh was selected, she and Respini "inverted the plans," completing the U.S. pavilion first, then going on to work on the upcoming ICA show for Boston.

Leigh made each of the Biennale pieces new for the Venice exhibition, working in her studio in Brooklyn, where she makes ceramics, and at a foundry in Philadelphia to bring the larger-than-life show into existence.

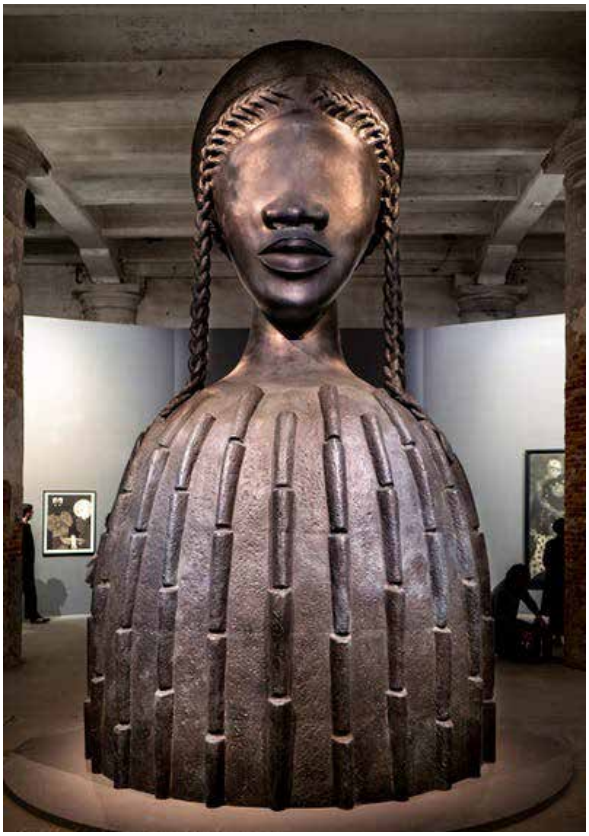
Framed by the pavilion's thatching and wooden beams, Leigh's 24-foot bronze sculpture, *Satellite*, stands in the middle of the U.S. pavilion's courtyard. Leigh based *Satellite* on D'mba (also called nimba) headdresses, which Baga people of the Guinea coast

Simone Leigh*: Martinique*
Glazed stoneware

produce in the shape of a female bust to communicate with ancestors. Leigh replaced the bust's head with a bronze-cast satellite dish.

The sheer scale of *Satellite* nods both to the work's urgency—Leigh's insistence that what she calls the Black Femme body stand on the Giardini without being overshadowed by the nation-state architecture surrounding it—and the actual cost of constructing the bronze figure and transporting it to Italy, a massive expenditure of national wealth that impresses on viewers the power of the U.S. government and the foundations supporting the U.S. pavilion. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, for example, which owns the U.S. Pavilion, last reported holding more than $200 million in assets. Much of the Guggenheim Foundation's wealth comes from minerals and rubber extracted from plantations and mines in the Belgian Congo, Bolivia, Mexico, Alaska, and Colorado in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through colonial mineral and land concessions. Leigh's work in Venice, partly powered by colonial extraction and the brutal labor conditions and land expropriations that accompanied mining in Africa and the Americas, also guides viewers to attend to the fraught histories of colonization and enslavement, particularly the dehumanizing displays of cultural power and violence that the colonial empires wrought.

Simone Leight: *Sentinel*
Bronze



Simone Leigh: Brick House
Bronze

Lacking the same resources, many countries' pavilions are sited at the Arsenale, a complex of former shipyards and armories a roughly ten-minute walk down the waterfront from the Giardini; while others are at sites scattered around the city. (Of the just-named places whose mineral wealth helped fund the U.S. pavilion, Bolivia rents space in the Cannaregio district for its pavilion, while Mexico's exhibit takes place inside the Arsenale. There is no Congolese pavilion at the Biennale, though at the Giardini, the much-lauded Belgium national pavilion show, The Nature of the Game, prominently displays Congolese children playing in mountains of mining waste alongside scenes filmed during children's games in Afghanistan, Belgium, Hong Kong, Mexico, and Switzerland.)

Inside the three-room U.S. Pavilion, Leigh's sculptural works—all originally produced for the Biennale—gesture to sovereignty, the show's theme. Through the female form especially, Leigh explores how autonomy and 'Black femme' being can be embodied and seen in the wake of slavery and colonialism. Last Garment, a bronze and metal figure, was inspired by a photograph of a laundress working in Jamaica in the late nineteenth century. The original photograph assisted the British colonial government to circulate the trope of a stereotypical loyal, dutiful Jamaican worker the government at the time used to promote the island for tourism. Leigh's sculpture interrogates the history of how colonialisms were figured, recasting female labor as both solemn and dignified.

Elsewhere, with the glazed stoneware, Jug, Leigh similarly rescales the human figure, creating two enlarged "face vessels," a stoneware artform that a group of both enslaved and free African American potters living in Edgefield District, South Carolina invented.

Sentinel, a sixteen-foot elongated female form that Leigh cast in bronze, sits in the Rotunda; on opening day, dozens of visitors make their way around the figure, which Leigh created inspired by her study of anthropomorphic African power objects and Zulu fertility ladles. Leigh's sculpture, which, according to Respini, Leigh made to measure for the rotunda, encodes layers of meanings about female bodies, fertility, caregiving, and consumption into the figure. Standing beneath Sentinel, Respini says she feels a sense that viewers, as well as Leigh's other work at the Biennale, are "under [Sentinel's] protective gaze."

In the next room, Leigh exhibits another cast bronze figure, *Sharifa,* a portrait of the author Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, alongside *Conspiracy*, a short film that depicts the sculpture's making.

Not all parts of the U.S. Pavilion are on display at the Giardini. At the end of the Biennale, Rashida Bumbray, Director of Culture and Art at the Open Society Foundation and a curator who has worked with Leigh for many years, will convene Loophole, a large gathering of Black Femme thinkers. Bumbray, who spoke to New Art Examiner about Loophole, called the convening a "culminating artwork" for Leigh's exhibition; it will bring together in Venice some of the Black women artists and intellectuals who "make [Leigh's] practice possible." Loophole follows Loophole of Retreat, a 2019 gathering of Black female artists and intellectuals at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Much like Leigh's sculptures, Loophole will foreground collaboration—across generations, places, and academic and artistic disciplines. Its authorship is also multiple. Leigh is "committed to authorship," Bumbray says, and made space for others—Bumbray; author and literary scholar Saidiya Hartman; and a long list of seminal Black female thinkers and artists to not just take part in the Biennale but also claim partial authorship of the American Pavilion show through Loophole.

"Not everyone can come to Venice," Respini, the ICA

chief and pavilion co-curator, told New Art Examiner. That is why it is really important that audiences… can see Leigh's work in [the United States] next year. According to Respini, "the U.S. pavilion will form the nucleus of the larger survey" exhibition when it opens at the ICA in March 2023. The survey will join Leigh's work for the Biennale with works from 20 years of Leigh's career, allowing audiences, first in Boston, then in Washington, D.C. and nationally, to, in Respini's words, "see the throughline of [Leigh's] work, see a visual language, and see the consistency of her concerns."

The Biennale of Women

Liviana Martin

Never, as in this 59th Venice Biennale of art, have there been so many artists from all over the world. *The Milk of Dreams* is the title of the Biennale, taken from the book by the surrealist painter Leonora Carrington. An enigmatic title to suggest current themes: the relationship between man and nature, between man and technology, the metamorphosis of the body, the reuse of materials, in the name of environmental sustainability. Between the two exhibition venues, the Giardini and the Arsenale, the visitor gets lost, so that a choice of the most interesting projects and works, obviously reductive and subjective, is necessary.

Not everything seemed to be at the level of past editions, this is certainly not a dream Biennale, even if the dream recurs frequently in the curators' intentions as one of the inherent components of the exhibition. But, among the positive aspects, *Historical Capsules* should be mentioned, a collection of works that forecasts the contemporary artistic trends that are linked to them. The main focus in the Central Pavilion is titled *The Witch's Cradle* and presents works by surrealist artists such as Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Carol Rama and others who in their paintings depict a deformed and wonderful world in which human figures are transformed, anticipating the metamorphosis of the body and the relationships between man and nature with some of the artists on display.

The Romanian artist Andrea Ursuta creates posthuman bodies in his sculptures, hybridizations, imagined as new combinations between organic and artificial, premonitions of a dehumanized future.

Fanciful drawings, where human beings are depicted together with human-animal hybrids, mermaids and chimeras, are made by the Inuk artist Shuvinai Ashoona who captures the dramatic changes experienced by the Inuit community in which she lives.

The denunciation of the injustices suffered by indigenous communities due to the most powerful nations is also present in the Nordic Pavilion, dedicated to the theme of forced uprooting perpetrated against the Sami people, inhabitants of Lapland. Sculptures made with natural elements (reindeer skins, earth, vegetable fibers), paintings that, like

Leonora Carrington: Portrait of the Late Mrs Partridge, 1947. *Oil on board, 100.3 × 69.9 cm.*
Photo Nathan Keay, Image Courtesy MCA Chicago. Private Collection, Chicago. © Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: Elements That Do Not Fit, Do Not Have To
Content and images from Ocula Magazine. Read the original article
https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/magorzata-mirga-tas-in-venice/

comics, trace the elements of colonial power, smells linked to Lapland.

The Roma are the protagonists in the Polish pavilion. The author, the artist Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, of Roma ethnicity, wants to highlight the cultural and artistic contribution of her people. She does it in a surprising and refined way: taking a cue from the fifteenth-century frescoes of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, she creates an installation with patchwork panels to portray the Roma epic, inserting mythological elements and enhancing the work of the women who wove these tapestries.

Simone Leigh, winner of the Golden Lion and the first African American woman to represent the United States, deals with the construction of black female subjectivity. Her beautiful *Brick House* welcomes visitors to the Arsenale: the monumental bronze bust of a black woman, whose round skirt resembles a clay house, and which was originally located on New York's High Line, is part of a group of sculptures that blend bodies and architectural references, from the howitzer houses of Chad to the clay and wood buildings typical of Togo. Leigh evokes the idea of a container, a comfortable space, an object of consumption and a sanctuary in relation to the body of the black woman. Her feminist and anti-racist discourse continues inside the United States Pavilion, whose façade, with the installation of a thatched roof, recalls a West African palace from the 1930s: among other sculptures, *The Last Garment*, a bronze sculpture depicting a laundress at work, washing clothes in a pool of water and refers to postcards of the colonial era that promoted the stereotypes of the 'good savage'.

For the Swiss Pavilion Latifa Echakhch uses everyday materials, wood recovered from previous biennials, to create large installations. The artist worked on emotions and musicality: as if entering the soundbox of an instrument we enter the Pavilion, where, with flashing lights, we observe assembled figures, similar to carnival parade floats: heads, hands, gigantic but ephemeral busts, made from material that wears out and vanishes quickly.

The war in Ukraine has also, of course, affected the Biennale.

I pass in front of the Russian Pavilion, which in the past years had given us beautiful exhibits; its closure is almost a symbol of the madness of men. Piazza

Gian Maria Tosatti: Storia della Notte e Destino delle Comete
Italian Pavilion curated by Eugenio Viola
Courtesy DGCC – MiC

Ukraine, a little further on, is a monument made of sandbags, representing what is done during the war to protect artistic sites from bombing.

The Ukrainian artist Pavlo Makov exhibits the installation *The Fountain of Exhaustion*, a pyramid of funnels where the water, flowing as it reaches the base, runs dry: it is the extinction of natural resources, but also of culture and politics.

The relationship between man and technology develops in the works of female artistic avant-gardes grouped in the capsule *The Seduction of the Cyborg*. The word cyborg is a word that combines cybernetics and organism: it is not a robot or an android, but a human being integrated with an artificial technology that gives it enhanced capabilities. Artists such as Giannina Censi, Rebecca Horn, Louise Nevelson have imagined women's bodies as a place where the boundaries between human, animal and machine are more vulnerable, the beginning of a post-thuman and post-gender future.

The contemporary artist Sandra Mujinga, a native of the Republic of Congo, presents four hooded sculptures, consisting of cloaks with human features and long fabric limbs, tentacles and trunks, almost humanoids evolved to adapt to the world to come.

The Venice pavilion represents with elegance and originality the most classic of the myths of metamorphosis, that of the nymph Daphne, who, to escape the desires of the god Apollo, is transformed into a laurel tree. Daphne is represented in the first room by a hyper-realistic sculpture, wrapped in white sheets, while she, undecided about her fate, is immobilized in a timeless dimension. The next room has a laurel tree in the center that has its roots in a pool of water. Finally, the last room is entirely occupied by dark, muddy earth: an allusion to the exploitation of the Venetian lagoon and what man has done to it?

A condemnation of Italian (and Western) industrialized society is present in the Italian Pavilion, where the only artist is Gian Maria Tosatti. The three large installations that follow one another in the vast rooms have the evocative title History of Night and the Destiny of Comets and specifically relate to the failure of the Italian economic boom in the 1960s, even if the discussion can also include economic globalization. Tosatti has collected machinery and objects purchased from failed businesses such as conveyor belts, sewing machines from the last century, now obsolete and outdated. The visitor walks in silence through these large spaces, almost unused sanctuaries and feels crushed by the monstrosity of the machines. At the end, in a cathartic vision, a dark room where water floods the square from which goods should leave, almost the premonition of an imminent disaster. But, in the dark of despair, many small lights continuously turn on and off. The artist leaves us a message of hope, like the fireflies mentioned by Pasolini, one of his favuorite authors. From the darkness of civilization we can get out by relying once again on nature.

Biennale of Art, Venice, the Giardini and Arsenale
23 April- 27 November 2022 ticket 25 euros

The Shape of Freedom: Western and Far Western Abstraction

Christian Hain

Hasso Plattner is a man of many passions, from computers: co-founding software giant SAP provided him with the means to become one of Europe's top art collectors – over hockey: his ownership of NHL team San Jose Sharks might give us a hint as to where he preferably spends his holidays – to Impressionism. Among many more masterpieces of the genre, Plattner's (foundation) Barberini Museum in Potsdam hosts the largest collection of Monet paintings outside of Paris.

Historically, and if you omit certain other important movements, Impressionism led right into abstract painting: Monet himself paved the way for example with certain versions of the *Nympheas* and the *Pont japonais* and this summer, the Barberini unites more than a hundred works of post-war Abstraction from both sides of the Atlantic.

For long, Impressionism has been something like art for beginners, meaning that it appealed to the general public and wealthy collectors alike – capturing the light and mood of a landscape view is an emotional experience almost everybody can relate to. Yet today, things are changing, the mega rich appearing more progressively minded than ever before prefer to store NFTs of dancing apes on some company's virtual cloud, and the average Joe follows suit, thinking himself extremely cunning by investing in 'crypto, y'know', and collecting digital street-art. Metaverse is the new nature while Impressionism might have become an outdated pastime of the old white man. Most abstract painting on the other hand demands a certain level of visual and theoretical schooling, it has never been as accessible to everyone and not withstanding its apparent compatibility to technological aesthetics, this remains largely unchanged.

Given all that *The Shape of Freedom. International Abstraction after 1945* probably doesn't guarantee a new record attendance for the otherwise highly successful museum.

The day before the event, we received a friendly reminder for the press preview despite having RSVP'd weeks before, which is always a hint at the media interest being not as high as anticipated. Arriving at the pseudohistorical palace in the former Prussian emperor's city of residence just outside Berlin (Ber-

Exhibition View

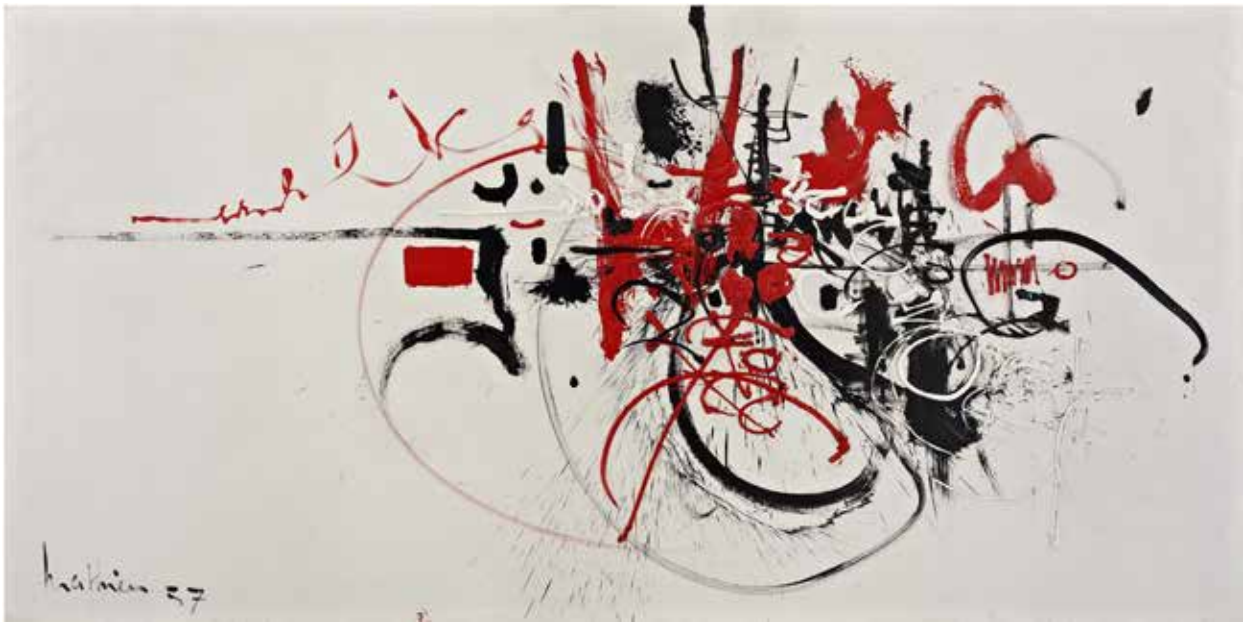
Hedda Sterne: N.Y #7 *(c 1955)*

lin's Versailles), we felt relieved to find not many seats empty in the second floor auditorium (you will inevitably miss the elevators and take the wide and impressive but also exhausting staircase, for example when visiting one of the daily lectures on art history, with a special focus on Impressionism and possibly not sparing some warm words on the collection and its mécène). Looking around however, we couldn't escape the impression, that most colleagues had a thing in common with the exhibition title, viz. their year of creation. (Maybe a different title could have helped to attract a hipper crowd, something along the lines of Genderless Abstraction - It's Vegan!– but I'm digressing.)

The exhibition will later travel to Oslo and Vienna, and a representative of the Albertina Modern already announced some alterations concerning the choice of artists and works and a special focus on Austrian painters but of course, just like the Munch Museum, they will stick to the general curatorial concept that starts from three works by Norman Bloom, Joan Mitchell and Sam Francis in the Plattner Collection and adds about a hundred works from major international collections (forgive my colloquiality, but who wouldn't love to witness such a cold call only once, "Hi, it's Hasso, mind borrowing me some of your Pollocks...? Sure, my museum guys will contact your PA for the details ... and see you on the yacht, yeah: Venice, champagne is on me!" Or whatever, I don't move in those circles).

The Shape of Freedom. International Abstraction after 1945 should not be understood as implying a continuity until today – the selection remains limited to the 20th century, which is probably a good thing: Abstraction hardly still spells artistic freedom to the same degree it did several decades ago. That title obviously carries another meaning too, referring to new hopes and a fresh start after the horrors of war and mostly German national– but also Stalinist socialism. People in charge of the exhibition explicitly include the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the events that marked a turning point for history and art.

Curator Daniel Zamani reminds of Sam Francis,



Georges Mathieu: Triumphal Return of Do Daïgo to Kyoto *(1957)*

who started to paint during years of reconvalence from a war injury and other traumatized artists refusing to continue where things had stopped, then mentions a renunciation of the human shape, which upon second thought appears paradoxical – isn't that exactly what those killers did (what every collectivist movement leads to sooner or later)? If the relaunch of artistic expression after the mass annihilation of the human body in real life consisted in its omission from the canvas as well, does this not - in a non literal sense – constitute their last triumph, a voluntary submission under their murderous rules and another instance of art copying life or: death? On the surface, the idea was about refusing the natural styles that were most popular with fascist leaders and would continue to prevail behind the Iron Curtain (Futurism was the only progressive movement with fans on the evil side of history, much more in Italian Fascism than in German National Socialism).

Be that as it may, here and now it's all about abstraction, the first part proudly brought to you by the guys who liberated Europe – together with those other guys you don't mention, not right now ... and yet it's impossible to escape certain associations, not least when reading the wall text on Ad Reinhardt's *Black on Black No. 8*, 1953 (...) he achieved a previously unprecedented reduction to just one colour - wait, what? How many visitors will spontaneously exclaim, Malevich? here (not to speak of his precursor Paul Bilhaud)? Besides, far from a complete break with tradition, later abstract painters often channelled their precursor Kandinsky in claiming some sort of spiritual and metaphysical relevance for their work, in a sense continuing conventional ideas of figurative (religious) art.

Bad tongues might comment, finally, the US entered history not only in politics but also in visual arts – with a movement that was massively influenced by a new and different wave of European immigrants, well-cultured, well-educated, middle-to upper class, future artists who often changed their name upon arrival, renouncing the past once more.

Having mentioned the historical origins, we detect residues of figuration all throughout the exhibition, some more evident, some less, be it echoes of the human frame in Janice Biala's *Untitled. (Still Life with Three Glasses)* (1962) or industrial machinery in Hedda Sterne's *N.Y. #7,* c1955. Adolph Gottlieb could serve for an example of those who tried to come to terms with the horrors of reality by abstractifying them – or is it only for the curatorial contextualization that we see things in his work he never wanted to show, from a death camp's barb wire fences in *Cave,* 1952 to the rising red sun of Japan in *Burst, c*1973? With different artists, there's pointilism or the famed continuation of impressionism: Keep your eyes open and you see it everywhere, from Sam Francis to Norman Bluhm (*White Light*, 1958) and Joan Mitchell who even lived and painted *du coté de chez Monet* for a while, in Vertheuil on the Seine.

To delve into detail only once: Barnett Newman's *Eve* reminds of a book cover or more precisely a cover without any meaningful book behind but before you protest, be told, there's the complimentary *Adam* too, and this is one of the rare cases where the title

Janet Sobel: Untitled
A known influence on Jackson Pollock

carries meaning instead of being abstract like the pictures. The dyptich references the artist's essay *The first man was an artist*, but also alludes to the Hebrew word for soil *adama* that is derived from the colour red, *adom*. It contrasts the colours of earth (Adam) and blood (Eve), blood and soil perversely being keywords of Hitlerism, too. If the like intellectual rollercoaster rides are not your cup of tea, you might prefer Jackson Pollock's – well: *Tea Cup,* 1946, an early work that bears more ressemblance to Matisse and Picasso than to the artist's later expressions – he was not exactly dripping with originality yet.

The Barberini also needs to cater to fashionable tastes and morals, and *The Shape of Freedom* abounds with woman painters who seem as important today as the genres alpha males (thanks to the quality of their work alone?). In this, they don't always escape the traps of ideological curating: It's perfectly fine to put a Helen Frankenthaler painting in the centre of a room – she was an important artist without any doubt -, but calling it 'the queen of the room' is not so smart. With few historical exceptions, a queen had hardly anything to say in monarchy, it was indeed the king who ruled: don't forget, that's exactly what you're protesting, and accordingly you should call her the 'king(!) of the room' if you don't want to dispute your own premise.

As holds true for every movement in art history, some pieces and artists have aged better than others, and there will be inevitable cuts to the canon as time goes by. So far, all household names are still there, Clyfford Still, Franz Kline, Lee Strasser, ..., almost every single Rothko is an instant 'wow' with the audience, thanks to the colours but also their size (this goes for all works: in America, everything's bigger!).

If you want to compare the 'Murican idols with their peers from old Europe, you need to wait for the second part of the show. In the European sector, it's all about Buri's echoes of surrealism, Wols' abstract grimaces or bullet wounds, Hantaï, Dubuffet, Tapies, Georges Mathieu, ... – you name him, and he's there. Whereby we have arrived at the biggest issue with *The Shape of Freedom*: although the Barberini won't tire to praise their approach of uniting both wings of 20th century abstract painting, they don't really use it. Instead, we find two separate exhibitions, the first one on American abstraction with all subgenres and keywords from #Action Painting to #Colour ('cuse me, buddy: color) Field, #Drip Painting, #All Over, #Abstract Expressionism ... and a second on parallel European movements, art informel &ct.

There have been many mutual influences, we are even told how seeing Pollock's paintings at the second documenta in 1959 came as an epiphany to Gerhard Richter and ultimately decided him to change one (the eastern) Germany for the other (western) when this was still possible (belonging to a later generation, Richter's works are absent here). If the aim was to prove links and inspirations, then why not show works from both continents together in a mixed hanging and build bridges in every room, back and forth over the big pond?

Extending over three floors, the exhibition(s) could also feel too much, too many while at the same time, it would have been possible to choose a still wider concept and present art in the context of historical documents relating to general changes in society. As it is, visitors don't learn a lot about that link to freedom the title claims, but those flaws aside, there are still reasons enough to visit Barberini Museum this summer.

Exhibition view: Photo: David von Becker

OP ED: The Gods That Failed

Miklos Legrady

It started with a 1968 BBC interview of Marcel Duchamp saying that art was unnecessary and discredited.

Around the same time contradictions stood out in the writing Walter Benjamin, of Sol Lewitt, and others. Today a global internet rapidly expands our perspective, when a 5 minute Google search yields information that previously took months of inquiry via snail mail.

History is as grounding as it gets. We depend on shared history to give us a sense of common purpose. We depend on it for context and perspective, and we expect more than spin when it comes to historical facts.

Among curious anomalies in postmodern culture we see deeply embedded errors, assumptions later proven wrong but never corrected. Statistically, all systems produce a degree of chaos, but such errors are kept under control by redundancy and reality checks. When that balance crosses a line the system degrades and the engine starts knocking. Political science says that your culture is your future, which means we must correct the past to fix the future. Our history could certainly use some correction.

There's a target over Duchamp's urinal, which wasn't Duchamp's to begin with. In a 1917 letter to his sister, Duchamp writes that the urinal was sent by a friend of his, a female artist who used the pseudonym R. Mutt. This was Dada artist Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven, *armut* means poverty in German. Duchamp likely appropriated *Fountain*, after Elsa's death, it was perfect for his project to discredit art; the urinal does say that art is to piss on. Now that's typical DADA, much like Picabia words in the DADA Manifesto, that 'art is a pharmaceutical product for idiots'. Canadian artist Michael Schreier points out that if used as mounted the urinal would piss out at you … the target is the onlooker.

In the 1968 BBC video, Duchamp says art was discredited, art was unnecessary, he wanted to get rid of art the way some got rid of religion. The documents we have on Duchamp shows a conflicted artist who did not fully understand what he was doing, something Duchamp recognized and admitted to, in the Cabane interviews and the 1968 BBC video.

Our catalogue of errors include Sol Lewitt's *Statements on Conceptual Art*, and *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, which say the idea is the most important part of art while the execution is perfunctory. Lewitt's dissatisfaction with perfunctory execution of his own work changed his mind, but he never corrected his Statements and Paragraphs; these are replete with failures of logic and contradiction of facts. Experience point out one must have skill and talent, the mastery needed to successfully express an idea. The execution is half the equation, if not more.

Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven

Another milestone is held by Walter Benjamin, who wrote that creativity is a bourgeois delusion, all we can expect of art is an accurate representation of reality, film and photography are the art of the future. John Berger's 1960s TV series and book *Ways of Seeing* brought a semiotic reading of and art history to the general public. Unfortunately Berger was a Marxist and Benjamin's spiritual heir so he stumbled when he wrote that painting existed to mirror the wealth of the ruling class, but now photography does a better job and so painting is dead.

Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven
Whose Dada work and letters to Duchamp are known

Among discoveries in science not yet considered by art theory, psychology confirms the importance of non-verbal languages; these make up ¾ of the vocabulary of art. We note body language, whose formal aspect is dance, acoustic language such as we use for music, and visual language where a picture is worth a thousand words.

The concept of non-verbal languages turns art history upside down, as sensation data and the aesthetics that evolved with visual language all of a sudden make sense. Previously art was under a cloud as the pleasure; now aesthetics are seen as elements of visual language. This would mean painting cannot die, anymore than literature.

Such obvious historical corrections should be easy, but there's human nature. R. A. Fisher, in a lecture on the nature of science, said the goal of science was an increase in knowledge, but when this happens it's awkward and feelings get hurt. Those committed to the past will fight tenaciously and reject changes to their comfort zone. Max Plank wrote that advances in science happen one funeral at a time, as the old school dies off, and a new generation with no commitment to the past mistakes adopts the more sensible correction.

BBC 1968 Interview with Marcel Duchamp
https://youtube

Senacour

Senacour sent his guide away
Wanting 'rien de mercenaire'
Between himself and nature's grand display
And conquered alone the Tête de Chalin
His, although not the mountain's, première

Despite the clouds that veined the peaks
His thoughts enlarged on that exiled spot
He saw an eagle in an Alpine crow
The Dent de Morcles up above, below
And the Mont Blanc where it was not.

Those Alps, uncrowded, undefiled
Had space to spare and mountain free
For Alpinists of fantasy
For dreamy bumbling pioneers
Verse in their pockets, heights in their heads.

Now armchair climbers yawn at screens
Where acrobatic experts drive
Assorted pegs through granite, race
Past long-left gear and heaps of trash
To cling like sheep-ticks on a last north face.

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*Etienee de Senacour (1770-1846) was the author of *Obermann*, an autobiographical novel whose hero is devoured by a hopeless melancholy. He also wrote about his ascent of the Tête de Chalin, a foothill of the famous Dent du Midi that looms in the background of all the pictures of the Chateau de Chillon made famous by Byron's poem *The Prisoner of Chillon* about the Swiss freedom fighter François Bonnivard.

Frances Oliver

Walter Langley

Mary Fletcher

Walter Langley: Between the Tides
Image: Warrington AG

This extensive show of 60 works by Walter Langley commemorates the 100th anniversary of his death, aged 70, in 1922
One picture has been sent from Texas. It's long title *In Faith and Hope the World Will Disagree but All Mankind's Concern is Charity* indicates where he stood on social questions.
Langley documented the lives of working folk in Newlyn, with the whom he had empathy as he came from an ordinary background in Birmingham. He was a pioneer in Newlyn, setting up his studio in 1882.
What struck me as I looked at these narrative works showing tragedy and sorrows was how much tastes have changed. Yet, all over Europe and America at this period art dealt with the painful drama of ordinary life. Photography became available but many of these artists employed locals to sit and be studied at length and Langley shows a great sympathy for his characters in the gentle detail and subtle colour he uses in oil and watercolour.
He shows men reading newspapers, one's entitled *The Politician*, and he is reported to have taken an interest in politics himself at a time when workers had such terribly hard lives. Langley was a friend of the atheist anti-establishment liberal MP for Northampton, Charles Bradlaugh, and was known and criticised in Newlyn for sharing similar views.
Now pain and death, living in poverty, hoping for loved ones to return safely from fishing, reading a message from a far away lover, are all dealt with in other media – a news story, a film, an appeal for support online etc.
Langley inspires admiration for his remarkable technique and careful composition. Having time to contemplate an image one-to-one makes a significant impact.
The portrait of Langley at his easel by Carey Morris and a droll caricature by Fred Hall indicate that Langley had a lively and jaunty disposition.
He is part of a whole movement of artists with similar interests but his particular observation and intensity of feeling stand out.

Walter Langley Exhibition at Pendeen House, Penzance, 25 May - 1 October.

T. J. Demos
Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art And The Politics of Ecology
Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016. 296 pp. 105 Color ills., 3 B/W. $28 Paper

T. J. Demos
Beyond The World's End: Arts of Living At The Crossing
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
272 Pp. 55 ills. $26.95 paper

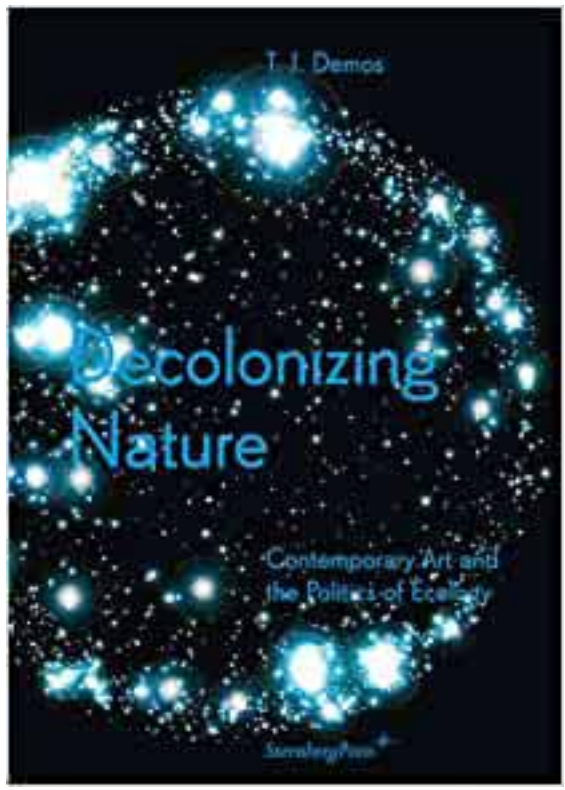
Andrew Patrizio
The Ecological Eye: Assembling An Ecocritical Art History
Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2019. 216 pp. £19.99 Paper

SUZAAN BOETTGER

Panoramic degradations from climate change are worsening, of which the most universal catastrophe so far, spurred by disturbed relations between animals and humans, has been the COVID-19 pandemic's depredations. The sense of ongoing emergency resulting from these conditions both inspired the books under review and stimulated their authors to polemical fervor. While in *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, T. J. Demos exhorts protests against nature being territorialized for corporate profit, illustrating exemplary approaches with activists' visual culture, his *Beyond the Worlds End: Arts of Living at the Crossing,* which nominally promotes artists' enacting of enlightened ethics, is more striking for his own expanded purview across the landscape of not only geological and biological abasement but also social and racial suffering. Andrew Patrizio, in *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, turns to art historical methodology to urge a broad approach that mimics ecology's process of networked relations.

This review is belated for Demos's *Decolonizing Nature* (2016), but then so is art historians' participation as custodians of the biosphere through the practice of ecocriticism. This neologism was invented upon the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992, which shortly thereafter established a journal, *ISLE-Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment,* and a biannual conference. Nothing on that scale has been done in the realm of scholarly art history; the belated focus of just 30% of the 350 sessions of the 2021 CAA Annual Conference was appropriately designated 'Climate Crisis.' But if the coronavirus has had one political benefit, the widely shared

We are being held hostage to corporate powers that place shore-term profits over long-term sustainability, as free-market economics is worshipped at the cost of our planet's very life-supporting capacity. The system of global governance is clearly failing.



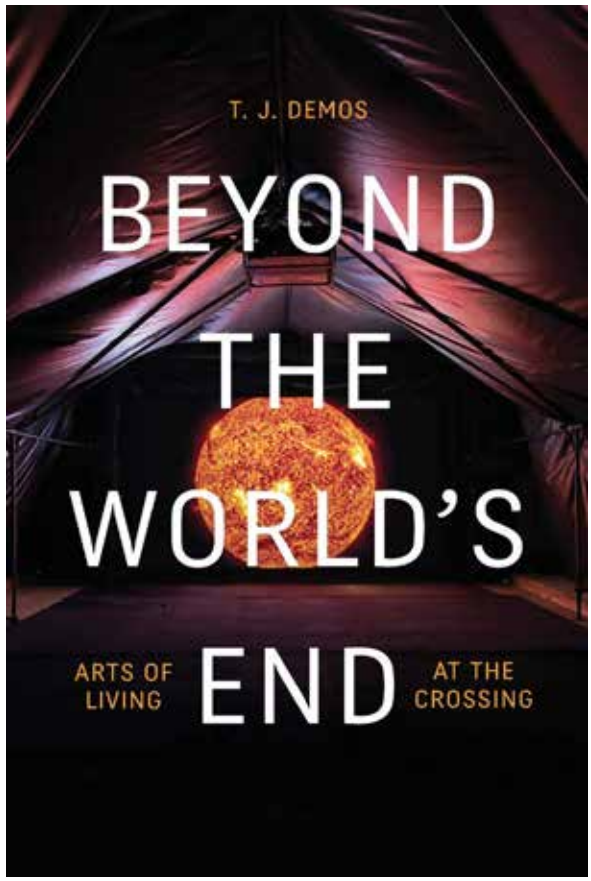
pain has served as a model of the power of consensual behavior toward group health, at least as demonstrated in some US states. Recognition of how the virus disproportionately sickened people of color and the poor followed, and then widespread protests against racial injustice and police misconduct. Those displays of collective solidarity can be applied to our overarching threat of climate change; attention to these environmentalist books is now timely.

The practice of ecocriticism intensifies the interdisciplinary methodology of modern scholarship in the humanities, requiring knowledge of the enfolded intricacies of biological, geological, and atmospheric sciences as well as legislative, political, and corporate acts, in addition to one's own area of research. A paradigm illustrating this (and aiding comprehension of Demos' approach in particular) is given in scholar of literary and cultural environmentalism Ursula K. Heise's definition of ecocriticism's "triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature,the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world."

In Heise's configuration, science and politics respectively bracket the analysis and interpretation of art forms, traditionally the central practice of criticism. Significantly, both are historians depreciate a close reading of art's material and visual aspects and resonant evocations in favor of focusing on the other two terms in Heise's formulation: overt subject matter addressing environmental deterioration and political activism.

Demos, founder and director of the Center for Creative Ecologies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and professor of history of art and visual culture, has been a prolific producer of texts for more than a decade. Increasingly emphatic, buttressed with massive evidence that is environmental in the widest sense, Demos conveys an admirable moral urgency.

His introduction to *Decolonizing Nature* announces his subject: “Political ecology' insists on environmental matters of concern as inextricable from social, political and environmental forces”. In that, he stands with and on his chapters' copious citations of authors famous for dismissing the view that the solution to global warming is scientific– the cause and cure are known – to emphasize the imbrication of environment, economics, politics, and racial justice; the resolution will be social and require systemic change. He is adamantine: "We are being held hostage to corporate powers that place shore-term profits over long-term sustainability, as free-market economics is worshipped at the cost of our planet's



very life-supporting capacity. The system of global governance is clearly failing".

Demos's contribution to the ecocritical dialogue is to bring the intersection of geographical, social, and economic environmental impacts to the art audience's attention and secondarily to inform his readers of artists' activism against sources of climate change and inequitable burdens. Thus, while *Decolonizing Nature's subtitle, Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, suggests a customary survey of art – here environmentalist – sequenced chronologically or by art form, his five central chapters feature mostly concurrent artists' projects grouped either by locale across the globe or by type of environmental disaster, a primary driver for Demos. Those themes are framed, in the first chapter, by a sharply critical assessment of early environmentalist art and, in the last, by artists' gardenesque projects for the ecologically aligned 2012 iteration of the international exhibition *Documenta*, which he found to be politically toothless. Demos's strident declarations make it clear that he has stepped away from the reticent podium of academia to advocate confronting the obstacles to environmental and social change and promote activist artists who are doing so.

Argos Collective in Tuvalu
Exhibition: Réfugiés climatiques - Tuvalu
Photo: www.collectifargos.com

One sees this in the first chapter, 'The Art and Politics of Sustainability,' in which Demos critiques the idealism of early ecoart as politically indirect. This is selectively exemplified, on the one hand, by ecoart pioneers Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrson's model fish farms and their orchard growing within galleries *(Portable Orchard: Survival Piece #5*, 1972-73), which responded to postwar apprehensions of famine ensuing from baby-boom procreation, and, on the other, by Barbara Macilsky's now canonical 1992 environmental land art and environmentalist ecoart survey exhibition *Fragile Ecologies*. Demos aptly terms much of the work in the latter show 'restoration eco-aesthetics,' projects that, with a combination of spiritual and ecological aims, "enact[ed] the repair of damaged habitats and degraded eco-syscems". In their time, these were important interventions , but he only lists in passing artist Mel Chin's famous *Revival Fie/d* (1991), in which hyper accumulating plants that absorb metals from contaminated earth were then recovered and recycled for green remediation, and makes no mention of the artist-architect Patricia Johanson's numerous commissions to design sculptural botanical and marine environments that clean water and soil. For him, these sorts of projects "depoliticize [their] subject[s]" and "nature ends up objectified ... divorced from social, political and technological processes". Without historicizing the beliefs that prompted such spiritualesque and directly ameliorative "aims once clearly timely and pressing", Demos appears to denigrate *Fragile Ecologies* for displaying values of its time rather than his. Also, he could have acknowledged that the practice of artist as visionary protofixer actually continues, as seen in both the subsequently discussed *Plantas Nomadas* (2008-13), Gilberto Esparza's project of "cleaning polluted rivers" in Mexico and recycling the "organic residues, metals, and petroleum-based effluents as energy sources, and in a recent major survey presented at

Arthur Jafa, Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death, 2016
single-channel video (colour, sound), 7:30 minutes, still.
Courtesy the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome

six European venues (*Eco-Visionaries: Art, Architecture, and the New Media after the Anthropocene*), which Demos endorsed by contributing its catalog's final statement, a condensation of ideas from *Beyond the Worlds End*.

Demos's chapters on environmental catastrophes in the Maldives islands, the Arctic, Mexico, India, and California demonstrate an expansive knowledge of disaster geography and social sequelae; his impressive knowledge of far-flung artists, usually only achieved by a battalion of globe-trotting biennial curators, is a major contribution to pedagogy. Although the art he features is chronologically contemporary, that which he appreciates rejects 'attempts to revolutionize modes of perception through unconventional, experimental aesthetics – which, however, tend to cater to exclusive audiences versed in the highly specialized discourses of contemporary art' (page 97).

Rather, he advocates work that illustrates political engagement and that potentially has persuasive traction, such as 'analyses of ecological destruction ... as well as creative alternatives that model forms of environmental sustainability and egalitarian structures of living', foreshadowing emphases enlarged in his latest book. He makes his judgment clear: 'Some of the most ambitious artistic engagements, for me, are those that enact an intersectionist politics of aesthetics, where art no longer prioritizes the gallery-enclosed experience of aesthetic contemplation alone, but rather emerges in close proximity to field research, creative pedagogies, political mobilization, and civil society partnerships' (page 13). The work he features is often photography – of environments or documentation of projects – which accommodates his broader criterion of 'legibility over experimental imagery or conceptual opacity ... a populist dimension'. Yet regarding a Tuvalu island during a tsunami, he did not illustrate a straightforward picture of a low-lying island but rather the Argos Collective (French) photographers' productively ambiguous water-level intimation of inundation, the slow exposure blurring the swell. Its imaginative sensitivity to formal manipulations serves to powerfully arouse fright, galvanize engagement, and suggest the limitations of prescriptive aesthetics.

John Akomfrah: Vertigo Sea
www.nikolajkunsthal.dk

Between the two volumes under review, Demos published *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Sternberg Press, 2017), a small grenade that excoriates the implications of that proposed geological moniker for the modern epoch, as if its environmental degradations derive from actions of individual Anthropos.

Rather, like Naomi Klein, Donna Haraway, David Harvey, and others, including the universally unmentioned Jussi Parikka (*The Anthrobscene*, University of Minnesota Press, 2014), Demos persuasively posits that the causes of the exacerbating disequilibria in nature and society are systemic, capitalist, and corporate, in relation to which he derides or lauds a few photographers and artists' groups. Both books under review, with their materialist assertions about the intersection of politics, economics, culture, and ecology, are useful introductions to his position and the visual culture illustrating that. The latest, *Beyond the World's End*, which, as in *Decolonizing Nature*, mixes new and revised published texts, expands his subject matter; here he approves of 'experimental forms of contemporary art and visual culture'. However, his exposition continues to be impacted: frequent use of fifty-to-one-hundred-word sentences, composing paragraphs spanning pages, and excessive repetition of the environmentalist buzzwords 'entangled' (famously derived from Karen Barad) and 'intersectional' (coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw) thwart his populism and intention to persuade.

In this newer volume, Demos begins by acknowledging our end-times era – so many losses of species, glaciers, and normative measures of sea level and of carbon in the atmosphere – and reframing 'models of aesthetic practice ... that not only critically identify manifold problems that threaten existence ... [but also] offer diverse approaches to a hopeful futurity'. Following an introductory statement, seven chapters enact his bold 'methodological intervention' of practicing what he preaches with thinking that 'refuses to limit the significance of climate to the biogeophysical realm' and 'expands the reach of 'climate' and 'environment' to their 'differential impacts, racially and economically determined'. Thus he embeds filmmaker Arthur Jafa's collage of news videos on *Black lives, Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (2016), within Anthropocene disparities and juxtaposes it to neoliberal delusions of saving the world by commercial geoengineering. Other chapters address climate refugees, extraction, and animal 'cosmo-politics.' These topics, central to environmentalist concerns, are familiar to many; more unusual and informative for a mainstream audience is his discussion of ecological scenarios in the medium of video games. Here he draws from research by Aubrey Anable (*Playing with Feelings: Video Games and Affect*, University of Minnesota Press,

2018) to make a psychologically astute assertion that 'games provide ways to rehearse and practice reactions, feelings, and states that extend nuance, texture, and expectation into everyday life ... they bear the potential to modulate present and future behaviors'. While unstated as such, that is pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's concept (*Playing and Reality*, 1971) of the 'transitional object.' That reasoning could be applied to the primary value of every work of art Demos discusses – each work not only provides information but also facilitates imagined experience of a thought or behavior prior to one's enacting of it.

Overall, political, sociological, geographical, and economic aspects of the environmental crisis and artist-activists' responses appear most compelling to Demos, driving and structuring his discourse, which nominally acknowledges aesthetics while regarding the concept ambivalently. Analysis of the formal and material properties of specific works and their emotional and affective effects is sparse, whether because those aspects appear hardly attended to by their makers or because they are of less interest to Demos. Comparative analysis of the work of artists commonly associated with environmentalism, such as Mark Dion, Olafur Eliasson, Maya Lin, and Alexis Rockman – all unmentioned by Demos – -could have further substantiated his preference for activists' visual culture that appears mostly outside the art world.

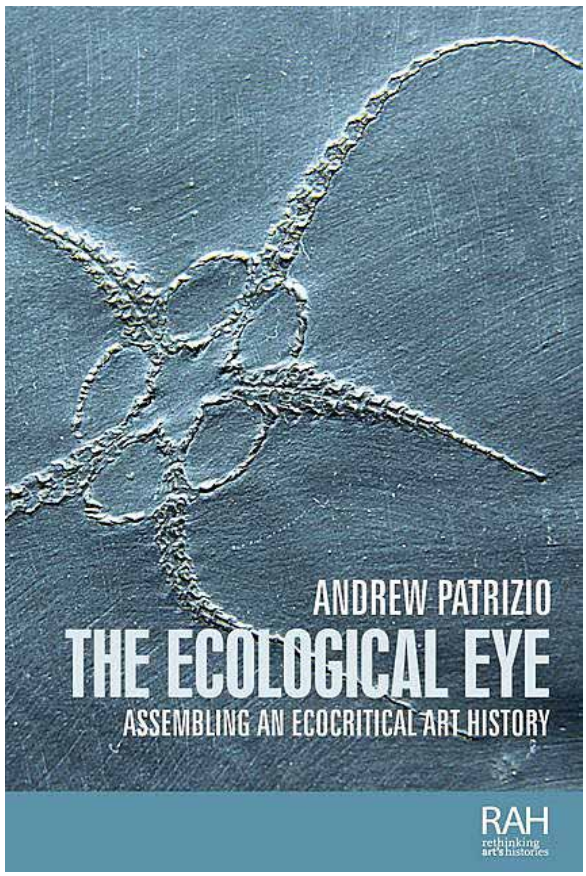
Yet *Beyond the World's Ends* chapter on John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015) – a film juxtaposing sea rise and slavery shown on three wall-size screens that is as enthralling visually as it is riveting politically – demonstrates that Demos's analytical muscle can wrestle eloquently with immersive beauty. Here his atypical laudatory suavity was likely prompted by the essay's commission by a type of institution he otherwise deplores, a museum.

Latent issues remain to be directly addressed. Demos regularly laments the instrumentalization of elements of nature, including not just petrocapitalism but the use of forests and animals, but he bristles at Artforum's prohibition against the instrumentalization of art to promote a cause, considering that circumscription a modernist myth. But we do not need art to tell us which way the wind is blowing, as Demos recognized early in *Decolonizing Nature*: 'The recent efflorescence of science writing, environmental reporting, documentary film and activist movements raises questions about what role art might play now that consciousness-raising is taking place through mainstream mass media'. Those paying attention are aware of the extent of our environment's

Overall, political, sociological, geographical, and economic aspects of the environmental crisis and artist-activists' responses appear most compelling to Demos, driving and structuring his discourse, which nominally acknowledges aesthetics while regarding the concept ambivalently.

decay; for instance, the *New York Times* reports on corporate and governmental malfeasance regarding the environment and partnered with the nonprofit ProPublica to publish in 2020 a three-part series on mass human migrations underway resulting from climate change.

Likewise, scientists, engineers, and legislators do a better job than artists at direct rectification. What, then, is the process by which works of art are effective toward consensus building? The video games/Winnicott model Demos describes offers a way, one that requires attention like Akomfah's to sensory aspects of art. Related, then, is recognizing that the postmodern myth of the anti-aesthetic – critiqued by Rosalind Krauss in 1986 as 'a simplistic opposition ... between formal invention and the social mission of art' – is obsolete. Intending to model and pro-



voke engagement with the political and social exigencies of climate change, Demos's forceful texts may be just as productive in discussions of the pressing quandary of how works of art produce social change.

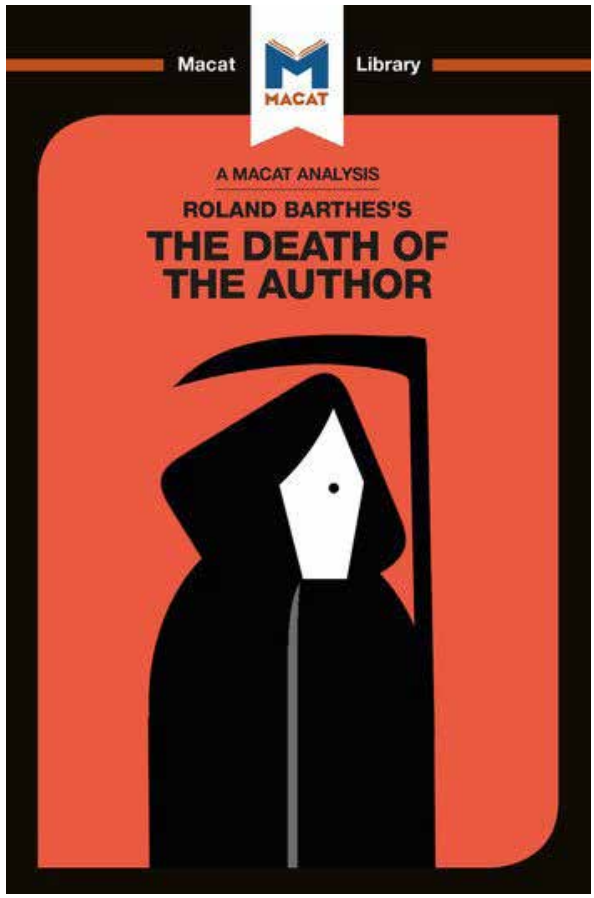
In a canny conjunction of the venerable and the topical, Andrew Patrizio, in his *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, follows those scholars who have acclaimed Millard Meiss's *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (1951) – in particular its integration of the 'severe drought of 1347 [and] the repeat failure of crops the next year' into the discussion of the devastation of the bubonic plague of 1348 – as 'pioneering ecological art history'.

That inclusion marvelously demonstrates both Patrizio's advocacy of a 'horizontalizing ecological eye over the work of both artists and art historians now and in the past' and his productive use of others' insights.

Otherwise, his art historian's eye (and thence the reader's) does not see illustrative examples of the analysis he proposes, as his is 'a nondominant form of art historical practice and ideological positioning [that] refuses to be prescriptive' (page 85) – or even demonstrative. Patrizio, who is a professor of Scottish visual culture at the University of Edinburgh and a critic and curator of contemporary art, laudably positions his text in 'a neglected territory that lies between the care of the planet and the historical study of visual art'. His subject is art historical methodology; he likens ecology's relational processes so a diffuse non discriminatory assemblage of approaches that he avers to be beneficial for his non-hierarchical analytical procedure.

Patrizio groups these resources, in which a 'degree of environmental self-reflexivity [is] co-implicated' as foundational art historical, feminist, and queer theories; the policies of non-hierarchy, anarchy, and ecology; and ecological critical theory, such as new materialism, post-humanities, and animalities. He particularly aligns himself with Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), 'a giant in the early formation of anarchism,' whose 'concept of mutualism and non-hierarchy; provides one of his ideals. Patrizio's research toward a new way of thinking was clearly expansive; the nine chapters average seventy-five citations each, ninety-six at the most. But his treatment of this research, which should suggest the intended audience, is confounding. He appears to want to convince scholars outside ecocriticism of this methodological approach, but his introductions on the plethora of quoted scholars are often cursory or belated, or assume familiarity with authors prominent within ecocriticism. He oftentimes evinces his observations by adopting another scholar's statement or their account of yet another scholar. Long passages by others are frequently not inset from the margins, making it difficult to follow who is speaking. Overall, this patchwork appears to have been produced less by a writer than a quilter. Or maybe it is a sly literalization of Roland Barthes's 1967 assertion in *The Death of the Author*: 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.'

Patrizio's advocacy for a flattening procedural tolerance is compromised by his eruptions of antipathy to the discipline of art history, which he considers 'riddled with narratives, ideologies, and structures of hierarchy, domination, elitism and power', even as he seeks to resuscitate 'historical projects that, to



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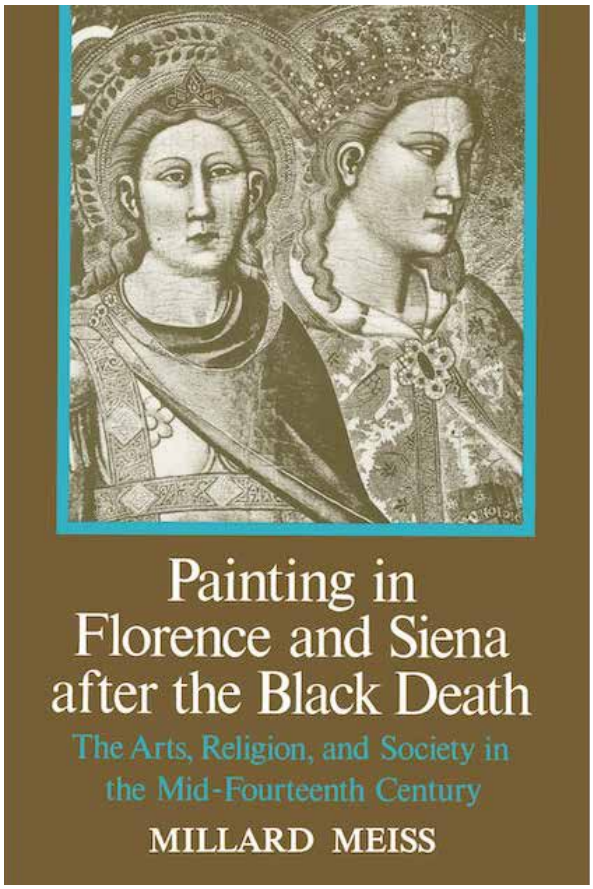

be frank, many outside art history probably no [sic] little about or at best feel are moribund'. His avidity for 'resisting the [discipline's] elite structures that still have a hold over parts of our work'; suggests unease about power itself. Not content to merely promote non-hierarchy as an analytic mode, Patrizio enacts it by suppressing his own authority; the blizzard of references drowns out his deeply informed authorial voice. And considering his strong environmentalist concerns, he could have distinguished abstract academic methodology from partisan political strategy; anarchistic non-hierarchy, one might contend, is inimical to social change. In a period of rising tyrants and the rolling back of global warming restraints, and when the very designation of our epoch as the Anthropocene indicates the necessity of inverting humans' destructive dominance over natural processes and aggressively eliminating carbon consumption, we need laws establishing a hierarchy of salutary values, practices and agencies to enforce them.

Patrizio's prolegomenon to the practice of ecocritical art history is a valiant effort to respond to climate change by rallying colleagues and describing theoretical practices fruitful to ecological thinking. Art historians' integration and modeling of environmentalist sensibilities in teaching and writing could not only expand understanding of works of art but affect cultural consciousness, conscience, voting practices, and policy change. The current mantra of ecocriticism adopts novelist Amitav Ghosh's call- 'Let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination' (quoted by Demos, *Beyond the Worlds End)* Demos and Patrizio offer a wealth of information on environmentalist artists and ecocritical thinkers who may not be presented to art audiences elsewhere. Their venturesome examples of art historical ecocriticism model methodologies of engagement that challenge scholars to apply their own talents and imaginations toward new practices of are history for our time.

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Subject headed BOOK REVIEW
Please include the full details of the title, author, publisher, date and ISBN.

Back to Childhood

Susana Gómez Laín

Miss-Cholera *1946*
Oil sand pebbles straw on canvas
Photo: Guggenheim Bilbao

There is a proverb that says 'there is not a bad thing without something good' and that happened to me when I went to the funeral of a dearest family friend in Bilbao. I did not expect the gift of being able to attend, by chance, an exhibition of one of my favourite artists, Jean Dubuffet *Ardent Celebration* in outstanding site of the Guggenheim Museum.

Dubuffet is down to earth and breaks all the rules. His works discover and point out the capacity of creation in the human being through skills, intelligence, age, knowledge or state of mind. He democratizes art and gives recognition to the undistinguished artist we all have inside us. He believes that everybody has an innate capacity to make art from the cradle. It is a gift that all of us can develop.

His works, widely spread along the halls, are affordable, simple, original and cool and so, so contemporary, even though the artistic movement they generated, Art Brut commenced around 1945, as a consequence of much suffering. He gives a feeling of the absurd joy of existence. His works are positive and optimistic in their darkness; and that is bizarre and weird.

We can admire his *Phenomena* printmaking series where he explored the possibilities of repetitions, with lithographs such as *Profile to the right I-XIV* (1962). Something much connected with conditions such as autism, Asperger and obsessive behaviours.

The *Non-places* and *Mira* series made just before his death in 1985 represent the capacity of creating your own worlds out of your imagination and in that sense we have no limits. Black backgrounds, entanglements, paraboloids, scribbling, basic colours, confusion, chaos; no need to be skilful or elegant. Like a child, pure innocence and expression.

In *The Misunderstanding* (1978) he paints on loose sheets of paper, cuts them out and then combines them randomly and mysteriously in a childlike technique which is outstanding.

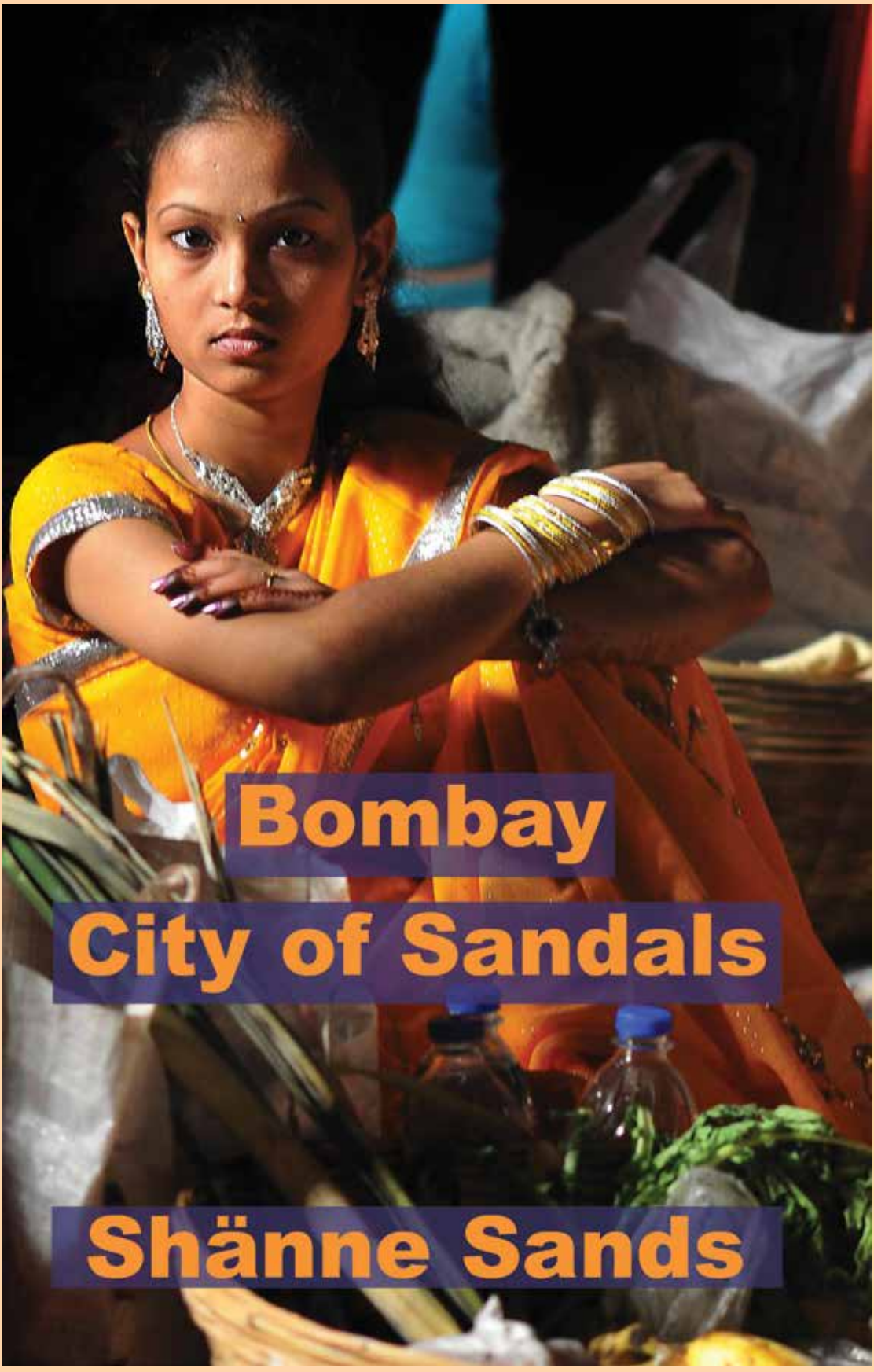
Monigotes come to live as sculptures in the project *Cucko Bazaar*, a pseudo-theatrical performance with no narrative shown in 1973 at the Guggenheim in New York, visual and left to self-interpretation.

And much more.

In short, this exhibition will take you back to the best of places: your childhood. You will reminisce some of your own childish characters and scribbling hanging on a museum wall and you will regret not to have followed that incipient artistic career of yours but don't despair you have the rest of your life to try, you only need to search inside you and take any artistic tool and start.

That is what Duffubet always thought.

Jean Dubuffet: Bidon-lEsbroufe *1967*
Polyester resin and vinyl paint



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