

## FROM THE EDITORS

The articles in this issue belong to, or fall in between, paradigms constituted alongside or in response to the new world order of universal global capitalism. While some articles fall within the purview of “global art history” or “global art criticism”—a relatively recent epistemological formation seeking ways to engage with the infinite manifold of global cultural production—others (in particular, the book review by Adriana Michèle Campos Johnson and the artist project by Daniele Genadry) gravitate toward “global environmentalism,” another form of world consciousness that addresses nature, or what has become and remains of it. Thus, the dialectics of culture and nature—or, put in more familiar postmodernist terms, of the “post-cultural” and “post-natural”—set the tone for this issue, as if reminding us of the basic premises of Western anthropology, where the nature-culture dynamic provides the ontological basis of the universal human condition.

This issue responds to some urgencies within the aforementioned “global” paradigms. Their authors address a certain exhaustion of contemporary forms within the culture-nature dialectic: on one side, the exhaustion of historical and critical models, the impoverishment of social life, and the expediency of culture, and on the other, the depletion of natural resources that has led to a catastrophic change in climate patterns. The exhaustion or depletion of these categories resonates with several of the discussions, in the guise of oppositions used to analyze

global cultural production in terms of the “public and private spheres,” “class and nation,” “aesthetic internationalism and nationalist tradition,” “realism and abstraction,” or “historical avant-garde and dissident late socialist art.”

Some articles attempt to overcome outdated critical models or reconcile the dichotomies structuring particular fields of study. For example, John Roberts’s “After Moscow Conceptualism: Reflections on the Center and Periphery and Cultural Belatedness” offers a new reading of non-Western Conceptual art, focusing primarily on Moscow Conceptualism. By departing from established readings of Conceptual art in the United States and Western Europe in terms of “dematerialization” or what Roberts calls the “formalist ‘hangover’ from modernism,” the author highlights the political dimension of non-Western Conceptual art. With a measured dose of what Soviet aesthetics once called “optimistic pathos,” he invites us to consider various instances of conceptualism from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the USSR/Russia in terms of their resistance to imperialism. By establishing Moscow Conceptualism along the historical trajectory of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s (in particular, the Productivist ethos of bridging art and life), the author seeks to reconcile the political and aesthetic programs of artistic movements formed at opposite historical ends (1917’s communist revolution and 1989’s transition to democracy) of Russian/Soviet history. Invested in the vitality of the “avant-garde,” Roberts invites us to revisit forms of artistic production that occurred around the year 1989 (the neoliberal chronological monument to the “end of history”) within a longer *durée* and a more complex field of aesthetic, ideological, and political forces.

Nicholas C. Morgan’s “Forging a Public Sphere: José Leonilson in the *Folha de São Paulo*,” addresses the role of art in the context of Brazil’s “transition to democracy.” Morgan argues that Leonilson inserted a voice of minoritarian politics into the mainstream public sphere through the pages of the Brazilian daily newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. The author believes that, somewhat similarly to the Moscow Conceptualists who actively contributed to the dismantling of Soviet collectivity and the viscosity of the totalitarian aesthetics of late socialism, Leonilson’s drawings imagine a different kind of relation to publicness, one emphasizing the micropolitical and the intimate that leads to the reconceptualization of the public sphere as a fictionalizable, but instrumentally useful, formation.

The “individual” and the “private,” which became key signifiers during the transitions to liberal market democracies in both Brazil and Russia, have not always been a main concern for artists. Jing Cao’s contribution to the Document section, composed of two dialogues between David Alfaro Siqueiros and members of the official Chinese Artists’ Association, offers a glimpse into the kinds of questions that preoccupied artists from nonaligned and socialist countries during the 1950s. At that historical juncture, progressive international art made outside of North America and Western Europe, both increasingly dominated by the logic of the market, concerned itself with the question of what a truly progressive art might be and how it could serve the masses. The issue of what artistic form was best suited to the recently established People’s Republic of China (1949) is not a simple matter of “propaganda,” as the “free” Western cultural elites sponsored by the CIA would have it; it also involves more complex political and aesthetic problems regarding such matters as tradition (*guohua*, traditional Chinese ink painting), Socialist Realism, progressive (Western) social realism, and Western formalist artistic conventions. These conversations open toward new dimensions and other antinomies not unrelated to the culture-nature dialectics that revolve around categories such as “class and nation” or “realism and formalism” (or “abstraction”).

Fares Chalabi’s article “Art as Resistance in Postwar Lebanon” in its turn invites us to consider a new “regime of visibility” that, as the author argues, is characteristic of postwar Lebanese contemporary art. Chalabi proposes a new interpretation of artists and writers of different generations who emerged on the local and international art scenes at the end of the Lebanese Civil War, an event that corresponded with the fall of “really existing socialism” in Eastern Europe and the beginning of global neo-liberalization. Similar in some respects to Roberts’s affirmative reading of Moscow Conceptualism, Chalabi emphasizes the progressive contribution of post-Civil War Lebanese art to the construction of a new visual language that allegedly questioned the hegemonic regimes of visibility accompanying dominant Western ways of interpreting phenomena, as well as their social and historical determinations.

The Lebanese-American painter Daniele Genadry, who belongs to this new generation of Lebanese artists discussed by Chalabi, contributes to this issue with a project entitled *The Material Conditions of Representation* that deals with a specific set of questions addressing this journal’s materiality (paper weight, the die cut and trim, texture, tone,

folding) and different modes of presenting information (image and text, reality, illusion). Through an illusory image of a Lebanese landscape, Genadry invites us to ponder the dialectics of the material and the ideal, nature and culture, highlighting the reader's phenomenological encounter with the material or "natural" aspects of culture through the materiality of the journal.

Finally, nature and landscape reenter this issue through Adriana Michéle Campos Johnson's review article "Art and Our Surrounds: Emergent and Residual Languages," which raises the question of the role of art in contemporary eco-activism and in other practices related to climate change. Johnson reflects on a number of recently published books (T. J. Demos's *Decolonizing Nature*, 2016, and *Against the Anthropocene*, 2017, as well as Jens Andermann's *Tierras en trance*, 2018) that address the nexus of contemporary art and global environmentalism. The reviewer highlights the paradigm shift in North and Latin American literary and cultural studies that goes by the name of "eco-criticism," pointing to a gap (or undialectical separation) between environmental thinking and cultural practices—a gap that contributes to the "concealment" of, or even the failure of, contemporary cultural forms to recognize the imminent natural crisis.

NOTE On the back cover of the previous issue (8.3), the name of the artist David Alfaro Siqueiros was misspelled. We regret the error.