

FROM THE EDITORS

We, the editors of *ARTMargins*, wish to express our solidarity with the antiracist protests taking place around the world, triggered by the killings of African Americans by police in the United States. We stand alongside our Black colleagues and students fighting against white supremacy and racial inequality, and we support the ongoing mass movements demanding racial justice and concrete social change from within the public health uncertainty of a global pandemic. We take the opportunity to restate here, forcefully and unequivocally, that Black Lives Matter.

• • •

The extraordinary scale of the antiracism protests that took over U.S. cities and spread rapidly around the globe beginning in May has conferred a sense of urgency to struggles against the deep-rooted injustices that pervade our societies. Whereas the reach of current demonstrations is in some ways unprecedented, their cause and demands are not new. The rallying cry “No justice, no peace,” which echoed throughout American streets, has a long history in antiracist protest culture. Popularized by the Baptist minister and civil rights activist Al Sharpton during the 1986 protests that followed the murder of Michael Griffith in Howard Beach, New York, the chant resurfaced in numerous protests against police brutality targeting African Americans over the past few

decades. At least once the phrase entered the art world, as the title of an exhibition of Social Realist–inspired works by artists Mikkel Flohr and Rasmus Nielsen in 2011, at Gallery Arttra in Frederiksberg, Denmark. In its poignant concision and almost poetic reduction of syntax, “No justice, no peace” can be heard as a response to the paradoxical demand for “peaceful” protests in the face of violent oppression. Ultimately, what is at stake here is the characteristic double bind of antiracist, anti-imperialist struggle, whereby every call for peace tacitly resonates and simultaneously silences the cry for justice for the oppressed.

The same dilemma informs and conditions Alioune Diop’s “Art and Peace,” written on the occasion of the First World Festival of Negro Arts, in Dakar, Senegal, 1966, and republished here for the first time. This issue of ARTMargins presents Diop’s historical document with an introduction by Lauren Taylor. A central figure in the Négritude movement and a founding editor of the deeply influential journal *Présence Africaine*, Diop was well aware that “real peace”—not the “peace of diplomatists” but the one that “spring[s] from the heart of the people”—entails justice. He knew that justice, in the cultural arena, also means recognition. The establishment of such peace was for Diop one of the missions of art. As Taylor puts it in her introduction, the goal was “to create mutual understanding between peoples by fostering a depth of intercultural empathy that was unattainable through political agreements or persuasive language.” And yet, as Diop noted, African artists “are little known. Generally speaking, they are not given their proper place, lost as they are in surroundings often indifferent or hostile to their talent or their problems.” In framing the problem in these terms, Diop’s text, as Taylor points out, anticipates the paradoxes and challenges that the globalization of the artistic circuit would impose on African artists.

Shifting from peace to controversy, and to a later stage of cultural and economic globalization, this issue’s review article presents Ghalya Saadawi’s critical take on Chad Elias’s *Posthumous Images: Contemporary Art and Memory Politics in Post–Civil War Lebanon* (Duke University Press, 2018). The book under review interrogates the memory of the Lebanese civil war era through the work of numerous contemporary artists, photographers, filmmakers, and architects. Central to Saadawi’s assessment is the argument that Elias’s book dehistoricizes contemporary art in Lebanon, while at the same time relying on the ideological

narrative of post-civil war reconciliation. Elias's work ends up reinforcing a certain neoliberal version of the human rights discourse. It misses the opportunity of real critique and fails to theorize the crucial relationship between past and future in Lebanon's post-civil war cultural and political context.

Beyond the artistic circuit, Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi's Artist Project *Jugaad* tackles informality as the determinant mode of labor in the periphery of capitalism. As Aamir R. Mufti argues in his commentary on the Project, worldwide integration, of which the contemporary art world is a cogent example, constitutes one of the key challenges of our time. Extrapolating from its original north Indian context where the word *jugaad* refers to a "frugal, nonstandard innovation or solution to a problem posed by a standard (and by implication, foreign) technology"—akin to a "hack" or "workaround"—Elizabeth and Iftikhar Dadi highlight a relationship towards technology that is characteristic of the adverse, informal conditions of labor in the Global South. *Jugaad*, in the Dadis' view, anchors the artists' interrogation of informality as a crucial aspect of contemporary labor, which, they claim, is often overlooked by artists whose perspective is inevitably shaped by the Global North.

The featured articles in this issue take us to two different moments in East European art of the mid-20th century. Caterina Preda proposes to reconsider conventional accounts of the establishment of Socialist Realist art in Romania from the 1950s onward, which tend to reduce the phenomenon to an imposition on the local art scene from above. Drawing on extensive archival research, Preda discusses the crucial role of local artists' collectives such as "Progressive Art" and "Th. Aman" for the consolidation of Romania's Socialist Realist movement. She argues that, far from a simple government-led process, the rapid spread of the new political art in the early 1950s owed at least as much to the artists' own initiatives and was driven by economic considerations. By analyzing the institutional structure and mode of operation of the Romanian Artists' Union and the Syndicate of Fine Arts—formed as production collectives that, through various state commissions of murals, posters, decorated panels, and other public works, provided artistic material for the ideological education of the masses—Preda presents a complex model of the adaptation of Socialist Realism in Romania.

Meghan Forbes's piece, finally, sheds light on the Czech avant-garde of the interwar years, problematizing another blind spot in the established narratives of East European art. At stake here is the failure

of conventional art history to acknowledge the significance and originality of Czech Dada, particularly as embodied in the activities of the Devětsil group, which included among its members (even if for a brief period) the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson. Forbes explores Devětsil's unique blend of Russian Constructivism and Dada with its original proposal of Poetism—an “art of life” or “*art of living and enjoying*,” according to the group's manifestos—as a triangular set of relations that informed the group's activities. According to Forbes, it was most of all the pessimistic, nihilistic, overall negative, and anti-artistic aspects of Dada that became crucial for Devětsil's avant-garde mix. In the words of Karel Teige, one of the group's central figures, to them, Dada was above all “Nothing. A glorious and banal nothing.” Yet, as Forbes notes, “from nothing, art and poetry might come to life.”