

FROM THE EDITORS

Ten years ago, the printed version of *ARTMargins* joined its sister publication, *ARTMargins* Online. The idea of the three founding editors—Sven Spieker, Angela Harutyunyan, and Octavian Esanu—was to create an innovative art historical journal with a broad remit that would offer some measure of correction to the euphoria surrounding globalized art at the time, and that would include contributions from the perspectives of artists, scholars, and critics. Would this hybrid publication model, which was somewhat unusual for an academic journal, be acceptable to its future publisher and readers? More importantly, would it find a place among already-existing publications that covered related ground in different ways, and often from angles we felt were close to our own? We have been finding or (re)formulating answers to these questions ever since, in ten rewarding years of collaboration, encounter, and conversation, both within the evolving editors' collective—which currently comprises Karen Benezra, Pedro Erber, Elizabeth Harney, and Saloni Mathur, in addition to the three founding editors¹—and outside it, with the artists, art historians, curators, and critics who have generously

1 Joan Kee and Anthony Gardner were part of the editors' collective from 2013 to 2014 and from 2013 to 2019, respectively. Andrew Weiner was a member of the group between 2016 and 2019. We also salute and thank our past and present managing editors for their dedicated service: Abbie Hinsman, Nick Pici, Hannah Yohalem, and, currently, Lee Colón and Marv Recinto.

opted to publish their work in the journal or who have collaborated with us in other ways. *ARTMargins* could not have launched or thrived without the help and encouragement of all these colleagues and friends, several of whom subsequently agreed to join the journal's editorial board. We are also deeply grateful to the MIT Press and its dedicated staff, for being receptive to our initial ideas and for steadfastly nurturing the publication from the beginning. We also happily acknowledge financial and logistical support from the University of California, Santa Barbara and, for a period of four years, from the American University in Beirut.

Sometime in the 2000s, the *ARTMargins* project was born from our intuition that the time had come to immerse Eastern European contemporary art—which had first attracted the attention of Western markets in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the decade after the end of the communist experiment—within a transnational framework. Crucially, it was clear that such a “dissolving” of art from behind the Iron Curtain on a global level needed to abandon, or at a minimum to weaken, the binary logic of the Cold War, and to adopt a perspective focused on connection, contact, and exchange rather than on division and isolation. Such a shift—closely linked to the extended period of transition experienced by Eastern European countries after 1989—could not be successfully realized without careful attention to the specific local contexts and the diverse conditions of marginality under which nonofficial art practices had developed in these countries during the Cold War. Several articles published in the journal over the past decade have devoted themselves to developing adequate methodologies for addressing this issue. Indeed, as *ARTMargins* broadened its geographic scope beyond Eastern Europe, the critique of global art from the perspective of its active margins—local, translocal, regional—became one of the journal's core commitments.

What is the margin?² In our initial editors' statement, published in 2012 in the print journal's first issue, we defined marginality as “less a condition or geographical given than a tactic that intervenes in dominant theoretical, historical, and interpretative models and methodologies,” implying a type of reflection that is relational rather than ontological and that aims to move beyond the hegemony of what has congealed into a recognizable object or become otherwise canonized. While such thinking was informed by postmodern critiques that understood, and often privileged, the margins—viewed as the limits of a text, the “off-modern,” and so forth—as the area from which centrally dominant narratives

could be effectively challenged, we have recently been reminded that to celebrate marginality, often from a position of real or perceived centrality, may not be sufficient when it comes to endowing the margins with real political agency and influence. Meanwhile, in art historical scholarship, it has similarly become clear that acknowledgment of the existence of local art worlds and of their dependency on real or imagined centers is crucial for understanding the dynamics of art's development after World War II. As Terry Smith put it in an article we published in 2017, "the panorama itself, and artistic possibility within it, looks very different depending on where you are—your location, your viewpoint, your sense of agency, and your actual effectiveness."² However, the question is how to calibrate and adequately address the imbalances, inequities, and asynchronies that result from such relationships, a problem confronting anyone who has tried to grapple with the notion of global or world art.

Over the last decade, what John Champagne some time ago called an "ethics of marginality" has repeatedly echoed within the journal's pages, sometimes acquiring a methodological thickness that took us by surprise. Thus, the print journal's first issue featured an article by Anthony Gardner that examined a series of material installations by Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn designed to confront the idea of Western liberal democracy through the prism of civilian torture in Iraq; an essay by Octavian Esanu tracing the development of contemporary art in Eastern Europe in the wake of the introduction of a liberal market economy there; an article by Vardan Azatyan that analyzed the rise of a national form of modernism in Armenia in the 1960s as the gradual disintegration of the Bolshevik Revolution's progressive temporality after the Stalinist takeover; and finally, an essay by Angela Harutyunyan, in which she examined the 1990s' transition from modernism to post-modernism in post-Soviet Armenia, signaled by a newfound belief in the promised "real" of the media images of global consumerism.

Writing with or from the margins, these scholars argue, presupposes a willingness to think art in reference to another place and another form of practice, putting pressure on the legitimizing ideas and discourses that undergird our neoliberal world order and its central pillars (the market, progress, capital, the contemporary). Such thinking has also informed the journal's sustained commitment, over the last decade, to the practice of translation, a project whose ramifications, as many scholars

2 Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem: Then and Now," *ARTMargins* 6, no. 1 (2017): 8.

have noted, go well beyond the mechanical transfer of meaning between different languages. *ARTMargins'* first issue included the initial installment of its by-now-familiar Document section, in the form of an article by Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg regarding the 1970s phenomenon of Los Grupos, translated into English for the first time (by Elizabeth L. Hochberg), and introduced by Karen Benezra. It was the first in a now-long series of translated documents that have presented significant standalone texts from local postwar art histories in English for the first time.

We are painfully aware that ours is not a moment for giddy self-congratulation. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging in much of the world, especially in its poorer countries and regions; in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian civilians are still facing attack and intimidation, in what has been a decades-long history of oppression and occupation. So instead of merely casting our glance backward, we present this 10th-anniversary issue in the form of a series of roundtables organized around questions we think pertinent to a conversation about the relevance of art in our fractured historical moment. At the center is a discussion about what it might mean to be *radical* today, flanked by three more roundtables organized by the *ARTMargins* editors, focusing on neoliberalism and its radical restructuring of social relations, including art; on the relationship between art and class struggle, in theoretical, art historical, and intellectual-historical terms; and on the notion of historical danger, theorized by Walter Benjamin in “On the Concept of History” (1940), which has acquired new urgency today as we confront moments of danger in our own recent past, moments that also inevitably raise the question of the exigency of art, scholarship, and pedagogy. Two specially commissioned Artist Projects conclude the issue: Anna Boghigian’s cycle *The Ghosts of Past Events in the Hall of Mirrors*, and ICEbox Collective’s *Taxonomy of Breathing*.

The question posed by the central roundtable, “What Is Radical?,” is variously woven into the other conversations as well. “Radical” is derived from *radix*, the Latin for “root”—in botany, a *radical* leaf grows from the base of a (rootlike) stem—which explains the word’s association with a type of behavior or action that can be judged to be thoroughgoing or extreme and that acquired its political inflection in the late 18th century. By most accounts, radicalism is associated with a type of thinking or acting that seeks to rebuild everything from the ground up, an approach epitomized in the history of 20th-century art by Kazimir Malevich’s effort, in his 1913/14 *Black Square*, to base a new practice of

painting on a single act that would eradicate with one stroke the entire history of Western painting. Today we are witnessing different forms of radicality, less focused on charismatic agents and lone radical gestures (such as the *Black Square*) than on connectivity and solidarity, turning radicalism away from associations with exceptional individuals and toward challenges to the status quo that are posed by mass movements, often operating from positions of marginality. How can academic, including art historical, scholarship respond to this shift, which cannot be understood adequately without the pivot, since the 1960s, to post-art positions that combine art production with radical political and social activism, in a way that makes “radical art” ever harder to define in isolation? As the responses we publish in this anniversary issue demonstrate, there is no single, let alone simple, answer to this question, much as there is no simple answer to the question of how we can think about radicalism from within the totality of our neoliberal reality—where certain kinds of social and political radicalism are institutionally embraced, even promoted, for as long as they do not tamper with existing class relations and security regimes, or begin to substantially affect the existing social and economic status quo. There is perhaps no better example of this than our universities, where radically progressive social agendas are quickly embraced and even institutionalized, while at the same time the idea of the university as a service-oriented business continues to gain ground and remains, all too often, uncontested.

Apart from the word’s social and political overtones, *radical* has another meaning that is evoked less often. Here the term refers to what is vital and necessary to life, implying a commitment to the present and its exigencies over ideology, and to real rather than imagined histories. Decades ago, Edward Said identified the project of a Palestinian *patrie* as building a homeland whose political destiny would not be based on racist exclusion and division, but on the idea of “human contact . . . between people for whom differences animate more exchange rather than more hostility.”³ In this ultimately optimistic spirit, we have invited our friends and colleagues to address what it might mean, for a scholar in the humanities today, to be radical.

We dedicate this anniversary issue to the late Svetlana Boym, to whom *ARTMargins* owes its name.

3 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 176.