# ART AND THE NATURE OF CHANGE

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history of art
students'
association

University of Toronto
Department of Art History

*We wish to acknowledge the land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Wendat, Seneca, Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Métis, and Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. Today, this meeting place is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work side by side on this land.*

History of Art Students' Association 2019-2020

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# The History of Art Students' Association 2019–2020 is thrilled to present *Art and the Nature of Change*, a volume comprising the papers presented at the 2020 History of Art Undergraduate Symposium.

This year's conference sought to address the role of art and visual culture in influencing, reflecting, responding to, and giving meaning to moments of change. We invited undergraduates to explore how artists and art movements negotiated periods of political, technological, social, religious, institutional and environmental change through their interactions with artworks and with the culture of objects and museums. The theme of *Art and the Nature of Change* as exemplified by the research of our eight contributors is meant to highlight how art never functions independently from its environment and moment in history but rather evolves with it and often works to be a visual relic of what is temporal and ephemeral.

Needless to say, our symposium could not have been possible without the help of our various supporters. Thank you first and foremost to the faculty and administration of the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto who have been incredibly supportive and accommodating throughout this process. Thank you also to the Hart House

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# Problematizing Public Murals

Public art is a precarious endeavor. Unlike being housed in a gallery or museum where the decision to interact with the work is a decision made by the spectator, public art—by definition—exists in a communal realm where its potential for interaction is non-negotiable. Some public works of art have been overwhelmingly successful. Much has been written about Anish Kapoor's beloved *Cloud Gate*, aka "the bean" in Chicago. However, other works have been met with intense backlash and criticism. Another work by Kapoor, *Dirty Corner* exhibited at Versailles, resulted in a lawsuit filed by the city of Versailles against the artist when he refused to clean antisemitic graffiti from the sculpture.[1] Public murals, however, occupy a more niche space in the public realm. Murals are not created in the incubator of an artist's studio and then transplanted to a specified site. Instead, they are painted on to the structural foundations of the community in which they will ultimately reside, making them both a derivative of, and a driving force for, the social consciousness of a community. In this way, the critical discourse surrounding these works extends beyond an aesthetic evaluation, and into the sphere of the sociological. The problematization of murals in regards to their specific sociopolitical positioning leads to many murals being whitewashed or covered. This paper will debate the function of public murals by looking at some of the reasons why murals are whitewashed. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) era murals in Los Angeles by David Alfaro Siqueiros and Meyer Schaffer were both whitewashed almost immediately after their unveilings due the critical eye they cast on the socioeconomic oppression endured by marginalized communities. Conversely, murals from the same period by Ethel Magafan and Thomas Hart Benton were not deemed problematic until many decades later due to changing community values and dynamics.

Finally, the murals of El Salvador exemplify how changing political landscapes can also lead to whitewashing.

In all cases, the destruction of these murals have more to do with the communities they represent as opposed to the formal content of the murals themselves.

## WHITEWASHING AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SOCIOECONOMIC CRITIQUE

In 1932, when renowned Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros unveiled *América Tropical*, his Olvera Street mural in Los Angeles, the crowd in attendance audibly gasped.[2] The work was commissioned as part of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Commission's attempt to "'beautify' a neighborhood considered blighted by city leaders."[3] However, instead of the expected serene tropical jungle-scape, Siqueiros's work was revealed to be a scathing indictment of the United States' neocolonial and imperial predilections in Latin America. In the center of the eighteen by eighty-two-foot mural Siqueiros painted a "stylized American eagle standing over a tortured Indian body bound to a double-lathed cross."[4] The mural was met with nothing short of abject horror. It was partially covered almost immediately, and then fully whitewashed a couple of years later. Similarly, in 1936 as part of the same initiative by the Los Angeles Municipal Arts Commission, Meyer Schaffer was commissioned to paint a seven by eighteen-foot mural in the library of the Los Angeles Tuberculosis Sanitarium. Like *América Tropical*, Schaffer's *The Social Aspects of Tuberculosis* had an uneasy reception. Schaffer's work confronted the sociopolitical aspects of illness, alluding that class disparity led those who were impoverished, overworked, exhausted, and malnourished to "[bear] the brunt of the disease."[5] After *The Social Aspects of Tuberculosis* was whitewashed in 1938, Schaffer wrote in the *Jewish Community Press* that civic art in Los Angeles was problematic due to its uncritical depiction of its colonial past and "disregard of the truth of historic events."[6]

The work of both Siqueiros and Schaffer was problematized due to each mural's critical relationship to their respective surrounding environments. They chose to make statements with their murals that directly challenged the impetus for their commissions in the first place. The gentrification of neighbourhoods has long been associated

with sanitization of one class for the favor of another. Such was the case with Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles. As part of the beautification effort by the city, many Mexican families were displaced in order to "create a commercial urban attraction where Mexican Americans reenacted their Mexican and colonial 'pasts' for the benefit of Anglo tourists."[7] This new version of Olvera Street was meant be merchandisable and clean, which only served to perpetuate racialized notions of Mexico—and Mexicans—as dirty and unsafe, epitomizing America's innate imperialistic tendencies. It is therefore no surprise that Siqueiros, given his communist leanings, could not abide creating a mural that would fall in line with this agenda. In his statement describing *América Tropical* Siqueiros said: "It is the violent symbol of the Indian peon of feudal America doubly crucified by that nation's exploitative classes and, in turn, by imperialism."[8] At the same time, Los Angeles was also billing itself as part of California's "Sunshine Cure"—a marketing tactic that claimed Southern California's dry, sunny climate could cure tuberculosis, cirrhosis, jaundice, and a multitude of other ailments.[9] The sanitarium was marketed as a "health resort" to upper middle class and wealthy Americans who would come from all over the country to heal themselves. Meanwhile, the poor were often left out to suffer with no support and blamed for their own poor health due to a derelict life. This disparity between classes is what Schaffer was pushing back on with *The Social Aspects of Tuberculosis*. As Sarah Schrank points out, the contentious discursive elements of these works are what ensured their destruction.[10] However, to that end, the murals acted as statements defending these marginalized communities from the repressive ideologies of dominant classes, and their destruction only made them more powerful in their indictments.

## WHITEWASHING AS A CONSEQUENCE OF CHANGING COMMUNITY VALUES

Several murals in the United States have come under scrutiny recently for subject matter which depicts minority communities in a racialized way. This past summer, the San Francisco Board of Education (SFBE) voted to remove a mural at George Washington High School. The mural, *Life of Washington*, was a 1936 New Deal government commission,

painted by Victor Arnautoff. Its thirteen panels plainly depict America's shameful colonial past by way of "slaves being sold at market and working in the fields of the president's Mount Vernon home and the body of a dead Indian surrounded by white settlers."[11] Likewise, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) announced plans to whitewash a mural by Beau Stanton painted on the side of Koreatown's Robert F. Kennedy Community School. Stanton's mural features Ava Gardner, but has faced controversy recently from the Korean-American community for its background, which is said to resemble the Japanese battle flag. The flag is associated with "mass murder, rape, and other atrocities [committed by] Imperial Japan in the 1930s and during World War II."[12] It is no surprise that these works have been problematized in the current sociopolitical era. Racial disparity and marginalization are far from being eliminated in America, and it is therefore understandable and commendable that the SFBE and LAUSD have considered the contemporary multiethnic demographics of these school's communities. For students who see themselves on those walls, the effect of learning in an environment where the persecution of your ancestors is memorialized on the very structure that is supposed to foster your development is reductive, to say the least.

Yet, there are defenders who still insist that works like these should be protected. Ethel Magafan's mural *Cotton Pickers* (1939) in the Wynne, Arkansas Post Office is a New Deal era commission that was awarded to Magafan by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts based on her artistic merit.[13] Most of the Treasury Section murals were commissioned for post offices and courthouses with the directive to celebrate specific characteristics of the communities in which they were painted, as well as gently nudge viewers towards the acceptance of various New Deal agriculture, industrial, and social reforms.[14] Magafan's work is aesthetically and technically stunning. The application of tempera on canvas gives the mural's figures a glowing radiance, and the color palette is vibrant and joyous. These are the qualities that belie the seriousness of the faces depicted. The entirely black cast engages in various aspects of cotton farming; and for this the mural came under fire by the National Association of Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the civil rights era of the 1960s.[15] It was felt that depictions of black cotton pickers were inherently racist and should be painted over, covered, or removed.

Susan Valdéz Dapena has written at length about Magafan's work and this mural in particular. She argues that because there were "concerns" in the Southern states about blacks and whites performing the jobs in real life, and a solution for artists who did not want to racialize their work by painting whites in positions of authority was to paint scenes comprised only of black workers.[16] Dapena concludes that because Magafan's subjects wear "modern fashionable clothing" and are portrayed as "capable of weighing the value of their own work", *Cotton Pickers* should read as progressive for its era; and that, in fact, "there have been no contemporary objections" to this work.[17]

A mural that *has* been recently objected to as of late is Thomas Hart Benton's mural at Indiana University. Painted in 1933 for the World's Fair in Chicago, *A Social History of the State of Indiana* is a twelve by 250 foot work featuring twenty-two panels depicting Indiana's "industrial history" and "reformist cultures" across from each other.[18] The panels were relocated to Indiana University in 1940 and split up between three different campus buildings.[19] The various panels feature all sorts of problematic elements, however the panel at the source of the current controversy is located in the University's largest lecture hall and depicts the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross and waving the American flag.[20] Defenders of Benton argue that his works are meant to depict *all* aspects of American history, the good and the bad. Erika Doss contends that the unpleasantness of Benton's Indiana University mural should remain intact "to remind us of the nation's legacy of conflict, violence, and racial struggle, and of our obligations as agents of American history to re-imagine and re-make America on less shameful terms."[21] Her arguments that Benton's portrayal of the "people's history" should be seen as radical for the time, and that public murals are often "the source of conflict and controversy on college campuses", which echo Dapena's sentiments about *Cotton Pickers* being seen as progressive due to their fashionable clothing, and that Section murals were inherently controversial due to their attempts at appealing to a broad audience.[22]

Dapena and Doss are not wrong in their evaluations of these murals' progressive nature in the 1930s—and one can possibly even extend an olive branch regarding their deflection of controversy based on the generalizations of the "type" of each mural. Neither Magafan nor

Benton have had their murals whitewashed, but nonetheless, the current sociopolitical climate in America bears consideration here. KKK activity and racialization of minorities are active and palpable contemporary issues. When a problematic "history" is still very much a part of the present, critical assessments of works that put these histories on display in the public realm are warranted. To truly "re-make America on less shameful terms," Americans must refute the ideologies that made it shameful in the first place.

## WHITEWASHING AS A RESULT OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Muralism was birthed from revolution. Los Tres Grandes—David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco—honed their distinctive styles by depicting Mexican revolutionary events in their murals. Art commissioned by and for the government or its adversaries has been a powerful tool of countries in the midst of upheaval, yet they are generally short lived as a result of whitewashing. In El Salvador, mural painting can be directly linked to the revolutionary mural movement of Mexico as many Salvadorian artists are trained in Mexico.[23] However whereas Mexico's revolutionary forces were successful in defeating the history of dictatorship in the country, El Salvador's revolution—which began in the 1970s—resulted in a Civil War that left 75,000 dead, and only ceased via UN intervention in 1993.[24] The Peace Accords imposed by the UN "ignit[ed] a leftist campaign [...] that came to serve as the driving force behind post-war Salvadorian mural painting."[25] Mural construction in El Salvador became a catharsis of sorts. Murals, as acts of commemoration, allowed those on the left end of the political spectrum to reclaim a sense of identity after years of oppression, and exercise a modicum of political opinion. This public expression of memory has become the basis for community building in areas that were decimated by war and continue to be decimated by oppression.[26] In her writing on the murals of El Salvador, Rachel Heidenry details how an unofficial mandate of newly elected political parties is to whitewash any public works that contradict their ideologies.[27] This ephemeral quality of murals, she contends, increases the ability for murals to speak truth to power as the communities consistently put up works on their walls, reclaiming their own identities one fleeting mural at a time.[28]

These acts of commemoration differ from the murals of Magafan and Benton as previously discussed. Where *Cotton Pickers* and *A Social History of the State of Indiana* are rooted in a past that no longer serves the present, the murals of El Salvador represent the world building taken on by the citizens of a country who's present no longer serves the future. In the city of Perquín, the open-art school Walls of Hope facilitates this kind of world building by engaging with local communities to design murals that "reconstruct the ideas that the people consider beautiful and that are worth the pain of [the] municipal's history."[29] Through their work with at risk youth the school has been able to promote a reconciliation of the trauma of war, with a new beginning. Heidenry's scholarship details this work:

> This movement speaks to a new generation of Salvadorans who were born after the Peace Accords. The themes and styles of post-war murals from their parents' generation do not always communicate the same values, struggles and realities that define contemporary youth culture. And with the globalization sharing frenzy spawned by the Internet, young artists are scoping out blogs to study international movements and techniques that *reflect their own lived experience* (emphasis added).[32]

However, graffiti—both amateur and gang related—is a persistent problem in El Salvador that is frowned upon by schools like Walls of Hope. Not because of the "stain on the city" as indicated by San Salvador's ARENA mayor Norman Quijano, but because the "clean up squads" tasked with cleaning the walls of the graffiti often cannot tell the difference between a vandal's tag and the work of emerging young art collectives.[31] As a result, there have been colorful and imaginative new works that have been whitewashed by mistake. Regardless, these oppressed and marginal groups of "young people, artist collectives and even gangs" are creating their own historical memory.[32] It is a memory of the present, formed by imaginings of the world they want to live in.

### LEGAL ARGUMENTS

Before closing, it is worth a brief discussion of the legal rights surrounding public art. If art is to be seen as an expression of the artist, then is it right for there be limitations placed on the subject matter or stylistic choices

that the artist chooses to incorporate? Moreover, "does art that is publicly sponsored and displayed have the right to offend community values and contravene local standards of decency?"[33] Arts and entertainment attorney Barbara Hoffman writes that public art becomes the subject of debate and scrutiny apart from the artist's intentions, and argues that public art (in America) should be protected under the first amendment, regardless of whether or not the art resonates with the public.[34] Most well-known of the murals that Hoffman uses to illustrate her argument is *The Twelve Labors of Hercules* (1981) by Michael Spafford. Spafford's work, commissioned by the Washington State House of Representatives, was deemed "too abstract" and "pornographic" by both the legislature and the community. Some school field trips were cancelled due to a consensus that the subject matter was inappropriate for children, which lead to the twelve panels being covered by curtains less than a year after their installation, and then removed altogether shortly thereafter.[35] Spafford became embroiled in a lawsuit with the State of Washington, and the court ruled that it was allowable for the panels to be covered or removed, but not destroyed.[36] In Canada, the reason that an artist would be able to file such a suit is based on the "moral rights" of the artist. Moral rights include protection of the artwork against "any act that distorts, mutilates or modifies the work" and affects the honour or reputation of the artist."[37] However, these rights do not exist worldwide and many public works of art that are problematized in this way are subsequently censored or defaced.

The question now becomes what we should do with problematized public murals. As detailed above, whitewashing can draw attention to social issues as in the case of Siqueiros' *América Tropical* and Schaffer's *The Social Aspects of Tuberculosis*, but it can also prompt controversy surrounding the archival nature of a mural's depicted history such as with Magafan's *Cotton Pickers* and Benton's *A Social History of the State of Indiana*. Additionally, the whitewashing of murals for political reasons has been shown to be both empowering and detrimental to young artist collectives who are trying to form new community identities in post-civil war El Salvador. So, whitewashing, while serving as a means to an end, is not necessarily the most effective way to deal with problematic murals. Perhaps alternative options exist. The preservation of public murals and their relationship to place and time can be preserved as historical

artifacts by way of relocation to museums. Yes, that would alter their function as public works. However, it is in this institutionalized setting that problematized murals can be used as teaching tools—especially those like Magafan's or Benton's. The relocation of these murals would also eliminate the potential for their conflation as monuments. The murals examined here are confronting, just as change often is. They are polarizing, as change often is. Moreover, they are public, as change— on a large scale, at least— must be. And what is art if not to provoke change? The question of how to correctly deal with problematic murals may still be at large, but whitewashing is not the answer.

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# Augmented Exhibits and the Materiality of Museums

It is almost ubiquitous in movie theatres today that before a film screening begins, ads are flashed across the screen reminding the audience to turn off their phones and stow them away. Recording with a cell phone or camera is strictly prohibited when attending live theatre, and doing so can result in being removed from the performance. In contrast to anti-technology practices in the arts, more and more museums and galleries are actually encouraging attendees to make use of their cellular devices and tablets to further engage with collections and exhibitions. These types of cultural institutions are having an easier time integrating technology into their practices, perhaps out of necessity to retain visitor numbers. One such example of the integration of technology in the traditionally analog spaces of museums and galleries is the use of augmented reality. There are recent instances of this happening globally, such as at the Tate Britain in the United Kingdom, the Rijksmuseum in The Netherlands, and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Canada. *ReBlink*, an exhibition that ran from 2017-2018 at the Art Gallery of Ontario, took the idea of utilizing augmented reality further. Visitors were able to use their smartphones to see the gallery's collection transform with 'modern updates'. For example, paintings became 3D and some subjects were shown using the very smartphones that visitors used to engage in the exhibition. The idea for the exhibition was to utilize augmented reality technology in order to enhance the visitor experience and provide a new level of engagement. In an age where technology is rapidly developing, it could be argued that this type of exhibition could become completely virtual and eventually make traditional exhibits, and gallery spaces, redundant. However, there is one defining aspect that makes both of these examples of augmented reality work; the visitor must already be in the physical gallery space, in front

of the works of art in focus, in order to engage with the technology. This is the key to having the experience become more engaging and fulfilling. Due to a cultural shift in everyday life with digital integration, museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions have had to adapt their programming to make use of digital materials and online presences in order to both retain members and attract younger attendees in the digital age of the late 20th and early 21st centuries to keep their relevance. Although the use of digitization and technology such as augmented reality are broadening museum and gallery audiences and providing a sense of new and forward thinking, it is the tangibility of brick-and-mortar cultural institutions that is imperative to the museum-goers experience; the act of physically being in the presence of an artwork or artifact is as significant as viewing the piece itself. Even with a shift to the digital, there is still a need for physical space for attendees to engage with works, along with the draw of the physical work itself. Specifically using the Art Gallery of Ontario's 2017 exhibit *ReBlink* as an example, it is possible to deduce that although technology is being implemented in order to enhance visitor experiences, museum and gallery visitors still require a physical space in which to experience artworks and artifacts in a complete and satisfactory way.

In our digital age, incredible amounts of information are available to us in seconds through the internet. A Google search for "Leonardo Da Vinci Mona Lisa," one of the most recognizable paintings in the world, returns millions of results. One no longer has to venture to The Louvre, or obtain a book of reproductions, to see the 500-year-old painting in full colour. So then why did over 8 million people visit The Louvre in 2017?[1] The answer lies with the phenomena of aura and authenticity of the physical artifact and atmosphere of the physical space. Walter Benjamin's theory of the aura was made famous in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In the essay, Benjamin states, "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."[2] By this, Benjamin is saying that what is lost when an artwork is reproduced is the *aura* of the work that is inherently attached to the original. A definitive uniqueness that cannot be replicated, though the likeness of the work can be.[3] The art historian Douglas Crimp writes, "…the

museum has no truck with fakes or copies or reproductions. The presence of the artist in the work must be detectable; that is how the museum knows it has something authentic."[4] This, the presence of the artist, is the quality museum-goers look to experience upon visiting exhibitions, whether it is known consciously to them or not. By being housed in glass or displayed in lavish frames – or even just being on display in general – our perception of the work changes.[5] Museums and galleries also possess the ability to regulate and create the atmosphere around a work. This is something that, again, one cannot reproduce when viewing a single work, collection, or exhibition through an online/virtual exhibit. Mark Dorrian writes, "the museum has long been an institution that is deeply invested in the production and regulation of atmospheres, which have both a technical and affective dimension (controlling humidity. . . but also the conditions and modes of display)."[6] The ability to control these conditions and modes of display evokes an atmosphere and level of comprehension that the average museum goer, who perhaps lacks an arts-focused critical background, cannot recreate for themselves. This aids the viewing experience tremendously. When speaking on the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, visitors emphasized the atmosphere, organization of the collection, and environmental qualities as positives of the museum.[7] Supportive still of the need for a connection with the original works is again writing in Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which he comments on the distance between the viewer and the object. He says, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye."[8] Although Benjamin writes this to support the idea of the "contemporary decay of aura", it also says something about the need for a viewer to be close to, or have a close connection with, the object in which they are viewing.[9] In a study on museum experience conducted by Charles McIntyre, McIntyre writes of the findings: "A physical building with objects inside, where things happened in relation to people and objects coming together in spaces, was the key encompassing focus of a museum's meaning for visitors in this study. The idea that virtual interaction with objects at a distance would be equally meaningful was not supported by any of the respondents."[10]

Therefore, due to the museum's unique ability to house original works for public display, regulate atmosphere, and provide a physical and interactive viewing experience, they are able to stay relevant despite the modern day ease of virtual viewing.

While housing unique or rare objects was an inherent quality of the museum since its inception, the direction of a viewer-oriented experience was not. Museums have had to adapt to the postmodern society we live in by transforming themselves from purely being institutions of education, in which the viewer had to work in order to understand the collections, to spaces that cater to the experience of the museum goer. Postmodernity has led to a shift in society, which has become globalized and saturated with new media technologies, subsequently diminishing the influence and the authority that major institutions. such as museums, possess. Writing on the survival of the museum in the postmodern world and quoting Jacques Baudrillard, Suzanne Keene writes, "Now, "one is not the simulacrum and the other the reality: there are only simulacra". This threatens authenticity and authority, normally seen as touchstones of museums, and invalidates the "real" things traditionally seen as the museum's heart. Even museum objects are dematerializing."[11] Though museums are still institutions of aura and atmosphere in relation to their artifacts, this quality is not enough to sustain their relevance in a world where the simulation, according to Baudrillard, no longer needs a real life referent, and people are able to use technology to build their own exhibits. The museum must entice the viewer enough to draw the viewer away from their own virtual possibilities. Interestingly, the respondents in McIntyre's study frequently described their desires for their museum experience to "come alive."[12] Visiting the onsite museum is the most common way to obtain this experience but taking it a step further is the increasingly popular integration of augmented reality in exhibition space.

All that being said, this is exactly what the Art Gallery of Ontario's 2017 exhibit *ReBlink* aimed to achieve. Alex Mayhew, Toronto-based artist and creator of *ReBlink*, created an augmented reality experience surrounding key pieces of art already in the AGO's permanent collection. To engage with the exhibit, visitors download an app on their phone or tablet, which is held up to the artwork of interest to

reveal its three-dimensional transformation.[13] The inspiration for *ReBlink*, Mayhew says, came from his personal observations and realization that a large part of museum goers glance at works for a few seconds and move on without further engagement.[14] This is a common inciting problem that has inspired the use of AR in many museums around the world, including the British Museum, whose efforts with AR has been successful in helping visitors connect more deeply with displayed work.[15] The result of this is in line with what Nelson Goodman, a philosopher speaking on the mission and ideal function of museums, has to say: "Works work when, by stimulating inquisitive looking, sharpening perception, raising visual intelligence, widening perspectives, bringing out new connections and contrasts, and marking off neglected significant kinds, they participate in the organization and reorganization of experience, and thus in the making and remaking of our worlds."[16] This is exactly what is done in *ReBlink*. The integration of augmented reality with the historically significant artworks emphasizes the new connections and contrasts that Goodman speaks of, leading to a new way of looking for the more eagerly engaged participant. Mayhew echoes Goodman's sentiments in his interview, where he says,

> the key motivator [for *ReBlink*]… is the ability to get visitors, particularly younger audiences that consume media and images so voraciously, to pause, slow down, and really engage with the work. It is all about the juxtapositions of realities. By looking at the past with a present-day lens you can provide a link to the past. And in turn the past can then provide us with an understanding of the present.[17]

All of this is to say that the defining factor for exhibitions that utilize augmented reality is the ability for the visitor to actively interact with the works being showcased in the physical exhibition space. Guests cannot meaningfully engage with objects virtually or from afar; the ability to actually interact with the displays means there is also the ability to appreciate the work in a personal way by inviting the visitor to use their own imagination when engaging with the augmented reality technology.[18] Mayhew intended for *ReBlink* to be an opportunity for museum goers to interact with the artwork in a way that personally engaged them, which was proven to be the desired outcome for guests in McIntyre's museum study.

There has been a clear shift in museums and galleries from being object-oriented to being experience-oriented. These spaces are not just storehouses for historical artifacts and artworks, but also now function as sociocultural institutions. The lack of a physical space in virtual exhibitions and online museums means that they cannot function as a sociocultural institution, something that is now imperative to the museum identity. These completely digital entities can help enhance the traditional museum goers' experience, which has been proved through the use of augmented reality, but cannot replace it.[19] Because there is a drastic difference, for most, in experiencing objects onsite and experiencing virtual reproductions, we should not want to replace onsite collections and exhibitions with their completely digital counterparts. The museum goer does not only visit museums to experience the work on display but expects a sort of collective cultural experience. The use of "interactive mediation tools," such as augmented reality, helps attract guests that would otherwise not go because of the inherent participatory quality, and gives the museum a more modern and accessible image.[20] This type of digital integration not only attracts a new audience but helps retain visitors as well after their initial visit due to the inclusivity built into this kind of technology.

The use of augmented reality in a space like the Art Gallery of Ontario, with a large collection of well-established works, emphasizes the use of the museum as a space that *lends* itself to the work, not as a space that inhibits it. The use of augmented reality and other virtual and digital technologies is becoming increasingly popular, and online innovations like completely virtual exhibitions are becoming cheap and easily accessible spaces to engage with artworks and artifacts. However, the needs of audiences go beyond just the visual in order to have more meaningful experiences with art. The draw of the museum as a cultural institution is a large part of the reason visitors initially enter museum and gallery spaces, as is the enticement of seeing the original works of art in person. Though the availability of curated supplementary information such as tour guides and informative labels are another reason museum goers are drawn to exhibits, it is easier to gain a fulfilling experience in a physical space, as these resources are often not as easily accessible or appealing. This is where new technology such as augmented

reality can thrive in enhancing visitor experience and engagement. In an increasingly digital world, museums must begin to reinvent themselves and their role in society in order to stay relevant and not be delegated as a purely informational channel, which would eventually be reduced to a completely digital entity. The audiences' need for personal engagement has been supported by multiple studies and is the key factor in the argument for the importance of physical space in these types of cultural institutions because it offers an experience that virtual exhibitions cannot. Augmented reality can help modernize existing exhibition spaces and attract and retain audiences and the main reason it works is because of its ability to harmonize with the physical.

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# Queering Nationalism: Athi Patra-Ruga and "Rainbow Nation" Drag

Coined as a "Rainbow Nation" by Archbishop Desmond Tutu after the abolishment of apartheid, South Africa's constructed national identity as a progressive, inclusive state often collides with the present-day effects of deeply entrenched racial segregation.[1] Apartheid, which means "apartness" in Afrikaans, was a social system put in place by the National Party— elected in 1948, it categorized people into distinct groups of "white", "black", or "coloured", requiring identification passes and reducing mobility between nonwhite groups.[2] Black people were deported from urban areas to live in Bantustans or "Townships", which often had limited access to resources and high rates of unemployment. Until a referendum was held in 1992 ending state-enforced racial segregation, many anti-apartheid activists imagined a postcolonial utopia in order to motivate engagement in the face of state violence. Now that South Africa is officially "free" of segregation, the discrepancy between those utopian narratives of "liberation" and the reality of high rates of poverty and crime in former townships is plainly visible. It is in this context that I will examine the artwork of Athi-Patra Ruga, a performance artist who extends the medium of drag performance into conceptual artwork in gallery spaces. Formerly a fashion design student who would don drag and take to the streets of Braamfontein, the "gay clubbing heartland" of Johannesburg at the time, he elevates the medium of drag-queening by using it as a tool to question and construct an alternative national identity.[3] As Alvaro Luis Lima mentions in his analysis of queer contemporary South African artists, "if apartheid's power structure is built upon strict binaries such as feminine and masculine, white and non-white, prosecutor and prosecuted, queerness undermines these distinctions."[4] In this essay, I will explore how Athi Patra Ruga's practice uses the performative nature

of drag to imagine a new utopian version of South African nationhood.

*The Future White Woman of Azania Saga* (2014), an exhibition at What If The World Gallery in Cape Town, is a colourful, ridiculously dazzling combination of sculpture, tapestry, and photography. The woven tapestries and photographs on the walls surround a sculptural work, *Thud of a Snowflake*, which consists of two bedazzled mannequins placed in a tableau. One figure (whose torso and head are entirely covered in multicoloured balloons), stands with its legs triumphantly wide apart, while the other (covered head to toe in artificial flowers) lays, defeated, on the ground. Made with the base of a 3D printed model of the artist, the two figures serve as extensions of Ruga, allowing him to simultaneously display several narratives that are normally performed by the artist in person. Several other tapestries surrounding this scene display the same figure, the multicoloured balloons covering the figure's entire head, only leaving its hot pink tights and matching stilettos visible. From the titles of the artworks, we can deduce that this balloon-figure is a reoccurring character named the "Future White Woman of Azania." Although the Future White Woman is the central character of this particular exhibition, we start to see other reoccurring characters as well, some of which include Miss Azania, The Elders of Azania, and, more recently, the Versatile Queen Ivy. The ostentatious use of rhinestones, fake flowers, polyester, and neon colours in his work evokes a sense of artificiality observed in drag performances known as camp, a term Susan Sontag defines as: "over-the-top, yet ironic theatricality".[5]

Typically, drag queens are biologically male, donning hyper feminine costumes and makeup, while, a more recent development, drag kings, are biologically female, enacting a hyper masculine persona. Usually, their performances consist of lip-syncing and dancing to high-energy songs on stage at nightclubs, a large part of queer urban life. The feminine/masculine presenting identity of the performer in costume does not necessarily reflect the gender identity outside their drag persona, although performers tend to be on varying increments of the gender binary. Although breaking gender norms was, and still is highly stigmatized, the popularity of drag culture carried on from the 50s and 60s in the United States, where underground gay bars and clubs would feature secret performances. While a simplistic

understanding of drag queens reduces the medium to a man dressing as a woman, Daniel Harris points out that "verisimilitude has never been the guiding aesthetic principle at work." Unlike trans men and women, drag queens embody a dramatized, ironic persona that often has very little in common with an actual woman, but rather a satirical take on the projected "heterosexual gaze."[6] Therefore, many drag queens highlight the artifice of a costume, for example, by making silicone breast implants visible, wearing clownish makeup, and ridiculously large wigs. He also points out that drag queens' "grotesque and strangely agitated gestures only makes sense when understood as a part of a fantasy," where "he is not just a woman but a celebrity, a great actress greeting her fans."[7] Harris argues that the "aesthetic of drag is the concrete manifestation of the straight audience's fascinated revulsion" of the breaking of cisgender norms, stating that, "it is in fact sexually reactionary, and all but allergic to androgyny."[8] Although his argument is a common one, I question his reduction of drag to an ironic joke, as it ignores its transformative, and non-heteronormative potential. Unlike Harris, Katie R. Horowitz points out that drag "offers a new metaphysic for thinking (queer) identity that is not a priori structured around binarism and hierarchy."[9]

In their routines, drag queens and kings critique socially constructed identity markers through a process of what Jose Esteban Muñoz calls "disidentification" - the marginalized subjects' political and aesthetic appropriation of exclusionary cultural productions for their own world-making.[10] For example, Horowitz points out that drag queens' names often "interpellate upper-class subjectivity" by referencing expensive tastes (Miko Chanel, Mandy Merlot), pedigree (The Lady Akashia), or celebrity (Shari Turner, Stevie Reese Desmond).[11] The use of these names suddenly allow drag artists to embody a gender, race, or class that they normally would not have access to. She also points out that drag is a space where performers can, like the queens who point out the artifice of a feminine body, point out the appropriation of black, latinx, and other minority groups' cultures. Especially in Xavier Alexander Jade's drag king performance, he deliberately mismatches a "gangster swagger" dance number to a country song, while also pulling up his shirt to reveal his binder (an undergarment worn by trans men and drag kings to flatten the chest area), "using the presumption of gender inauthenticity inherent to

drag shows as a platform to highlight the equally inorganic production of race".[12]

I read Ruga's artwork in the same way as a drag performance - this is not only informed by his overt interest in drag and the Johannesburg gay club scene, but his history of using the same critical technique as Xavier Alexander Jade, to use expected artificiality as a platform to criticize other social issues, mainly the violent and often historicized past of racial segregation in South Africa. It is important to note that Ruga is not the first artist to "elevate drag" in the same manner. Most notably, contemporary artists such as UK-based Victoria Sin have taken the medium of drag to the institution, creating photographic portraits, and ready-made objects featuring their drag persona as the epicenter of their work.[13] As seen in many large-scale contemporary art exhibitions such as the 2017 Whitney Biennial in New York, as well as the exhibition, "Queer British Art" at the Tate Britain, drag has proven itself to be a medium deserving of institutional attention.[14] However, Ruga's artwork goes beyond just the questioning of gender and brings in strong political criticism. In the context of Ruga, the works that have received the most critical scholarly attention are his pieces where he embodies the persona of Beiruth, a "genderless alien being" that interacts with various urban sites in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

According to a quote from the artist on the Brodie/Stevenson gallery website, the name "Beiruth" combines a reference to the city of Beirut, the middle eastern city, "a play on Orientalism", and the book of Ruth from the bible.[15] In Beiruth's performances, Ruga wears a black, shiny motorcycle helmet with a mass of black hair escaping from the inside, obscuring the artist's face. He is also dressed in fishnet tights, a floral, pink and blue bodysuit, and matching hot pink stilettos. Although Ruga describes Beiruth as "genderless", their ambiguity is constructed from the viewer's awareness that the artist, biologically male, is donning sexualized attire associated with hyper-femininity. Much like the drag queens discussed by Harris, Ruga relies on the heterosexual gaze, or the assumption that viewers associate the gender binary with normality, in order to express the "alienness" of Beiruth. However, several key differences distinguish Beiruth from a typical drag queen. First, their face is completely obscured, eliminating the possibility of using campy

makeup as a method of theatrical expression. While the conventional drag queen applies exaggerated, clownish makeup in order to highlight the existence of the stage and performance, Beiruth's invisible face suppresses a viewer's desire to find humour in the breaking of gender binary, as the viewer has no way of accessing the level of ironic, self-deprecating humour that one would expect. Secondly, Ruga transports drag from the gay club to the public realm, eliminating the aspect of hyper-aware theatricality. The result is a bizarre combination of campy sexualized attire, and an anonymous, blank face engaging with everyday life, uncomfortably resisting the heteronormative reduction of drag as farce.

This perception is best seen in his performance, *After he Left* (2008), where Beiruth silently and solemnly walks around the Cape Town Central taxi rank. Although the taxi rank is a central part of the urban economy, the space is not normally used by the upper-class who can afford their own cars or drivers.[16] For them, "a taxi rank is a loud, crowded, messy, and sometimes filthy place" for people who "cannot afford anything else".[17] Beiruth walks around this space, looking for a taxi to take them to "Atlantis", referring not only to the utopian mythical island mentioned in Plato's dialogues, but also the lower-class township with the same name. While they await the arrival of a cab, they are whistled at by groups of strangers, catcalled from far away, and mocked when they begin to suspect that they are biologically male. Like the drag queen's actions that construct the "fantasy" of their performance, Beiruth's alienness and search for "Atlantis" situates them in a different realm from the taxi rank-goers, highlighting the discrepancy between the two worlds.

Ruga continues the same theme in a series of photographs titled "The Naïveté of Beiruth", where they pose in various parts of the urban landscape of Johannesburg, interacting with the buildings, pigeons, and garbage. Beiruth's extravagant garments and the dramatic and glamorized poses in the images "deliberately evoke traditional fashion photography."[18] The expected "harmony and cohesion between the surrounding place and the way in which the model is presented" often found in high fashion magazines causes the viewer to "think of the relationship between the body and the space where it is displayed."[19] One striking photograph shows Beiruth, photographed from behind, as they climb a concrete structure leading towards the Johannesburg Central Police Station. Previously

known as John Voster Square, the site is known for its violent history during apartheid, where many protesters and political prisoners were tortured and killed. Finding harmony between the body and location is difficult, as the subject's "naive" glamorization of the space is juxtaposed with the building's association with state violence. Beiruth, as well as interpretations of them by scholars like Siegenthaler and Lima who state that "Ruga's alienness makes taboo discourses visible by provoking a reaction in the audience,"[20] participates in the methodology of examining drag as the "metaphoric use of performance."[21] In Horowitz' words, this "views performance as a metaphor for real-life phenomena rather than as real-life phenomenon in its own right." Ruga's practice before the creation of the *Azania Saga* relies on the relationship between the subject and the surrounding environment. However, I argue that post-Azania works by Ruga depart from the "metaphoric use of performance", participating in a new form of queer world-making.

As described previously, Azania is the fictional and colourful dreamworld of Ruga's creation. The name, however, is derived from a term used by ancient Greek traders to refer to various parts of the African continent, the earliest mentions of it dating back to the 1st century CE in a travelogue called "Periplus of the Erythraenean Sea."[22] Ever since then, "Azania" has been used more or less to refer to a historicized, mythical pre-colonial Africa. In the context of South Africa, it was a ubiquitous term especially for black consciousness and nationalism movements, and it was taken up by the Pan African Congress of Azania, an anti-apartheid group who broke off from the African National Congress in 1959.[23] Ruga refers to Azania as "a pre-colonial Southern African arcadia that was utilized in nationalist ideology to promise a perfect future."[24] Similarly, Ruga's *Azania* is communicated to the viewer via "quasi-historical artifacts and acts", including maps, portraits, tapestries, statues, texts and marches.[25] By accompanying his drag characters with a physical location, referencing existing national myths, and creating spiritual relics, Ruga creates a revisionist narrative of the national myth.

First, while a character like Beiruth only exists within the time-based performance pieces that Ruga conducts, Azania's existence as a tangible location that the characters normally reside in opens up

an alternative world of possibility, transforming a drag performance into something closer to speculative fiction, joining the ranks of existing afrofuturist science fiction literature. For the first time, viewers get to see the world that Ruga's alien characters come from. To do this, Ruga uses the medium of a staged tableau-vivant photograph, which, similar to eighteenth and nineteenth century figurative painting, concentrates pictorial narrative into a single image.[26] In this context, images of his various drag personas interact with one another, creating a continuous narrative among all of the pictures, much like a European history painting.

For example, *Night of the Long Knives* (2013), is a collection of three large ink-jet printed tableau photographs where the Future White Woman of Azania, complete in her iconic balloon-covered upper body and hot pink tights, is mounted seductively cross-legged on the back of a Zebra. She is flanked by two faceless "handmaidens" in black cloaks and wide-brimmed black hats and is led by another figure covered in neon hats. The figures are standing on short artificial grass, surrounded by a variety of leafy plants and flowers in front of a background of tiled swirly blue that recalls digitally altered photoshoots. The framing of the plants that literally encircle the subjects, as well as the obviously fake plastic grass give the photograph a campy, fashion-shoot like quality. The second photograph is similar, sharing the same backgrounds and subjects, only slightly altering the position of the subjects. The third photograph, however, takes place in the same environment, but omits the Future White Woman altogether, instead incorporating a woven banner hung on a flagpole, displaying a crest with the symbol of a bird.

Everything in the world of Azania is campy and colourful, including the flora, fauna, and objects used by the characters. The obvious artifice of everything inside of the frame positions the drag queens in environments where their otherworldliness is naturalized. If the queens were taken from their world and displaced, into the real world, the work would operate on the same theoretical framework as Beiruth, where the heightened awareness of artifice is meant to be read as a metaphor. However, Azania's tangible landscape alienates not the drag queen, but the viewer, whose heteronormative perspective can no longer operate in this setting. Therefore, the queens live in a queer world that is far from ironic jokes that "confirm the gender binary".[27] As Horowitz claims, they create

a "metaphysical wormhole of sorts", one that allows for "imaginative re-construction of identity."[28]

What is interesting about Azania as a utopian "dreamworld" is that the term is a misnomer: Ruga makes it clear that Azania is not a world, but is a single nation-state with clear customs, borders, and boundaries. Ruga does not mention surrounding countries, limiting the utopia to a fictionalized version of South Africa, making connections to national narratives, icons, and symbols. For example, the title of the work, *Night of the Long Knives*, which shares the name of the Nazi Third Reich purge of the opposition in 1934, actually references a "paranoid rightwing conspiracy theory that Mandela's death would precipitate a retaliation they called *die nag van die lang messe*", where black people would revolt against white South African government, repeating a mass execution.[29] Ruga's decision to reference this violent myth juxtaposes against the subject matter in the photograph, where a royal figure is staged, caught in the moment of an organized, militaristic funeral procession. The irony of replacing a violent myth with an organized event relies on knowledge of South African conspiracy theory, which is disseminated through word of mouth, limiting full access to the piece to locals.

Similarly, another one of Ruga's characters, Miss Azania, solidifies Azania's existence as a nation-state with its own customs and institutions through the use of the beauty pageant. In another large tableau photo found in the exhibition, Miss Azania, sitting in a wicker chair throne, crowned in decadent, over-the-top diamond jewelry, wears a lacy black catsuit and a beauty pageant sash draped over her torso. She is surrounded by a wall of artificial flowers lit by a crystal chandelier, displaying her persona of opulence. Her title as a beauty pageant winner suggests the existence of an organized competition among many different characters, as well as the existence of institutionalized beauty even in this dream land. Normally, the beauty pageant is an internationally organized competition where cisgendered women are voted to the top according to their exceptional conformity to conventional beauty standards. The separation of beauty pageant contestants by country works to create a narrative of national identity that includes beauty in women. Azania apparently also has its own set of beauty standards that

operate in completely different ways to the cisnormativity of real life.

Ruga further solidifies the reality of Azania outside of the realm of performance by creating artworks as objects, in pieces such as *The Phoenix is a Chicken*, one of many tapestries that hang on the gallery walls, functioning as a physical reminder of Azania's continuation beyond the scenes. *The Phoenix is a Chicken* is a square tapestry, woven with the symbol of a bird-like crest, which was also included in the photograph, *Night of the Long Knives III*. The symmetrical, simple design created with flat colours evokes the image of an official national bird that many nation-states have. Ruga evidently makes an ironic joke out of the national bird icon by transforming a phoenix, a mythical bird born out of flames, into a chicken, the most commonly domesticated and consumed bird. The object operates in two ways: Firstly, like the fake plants in the landscape of *Night of the Long Knives*, the kitschy exaggeration of the object participates in further world building, as we can assume that the land of Azania, inhabited by drag queens, also is a land of drag objects, creating a world of anti-ideals. Secondly, seeing the tapestry's use in *Night of the Long Knives*, and encountering it physically in the gallery space mythologizes, and sanctifies the object, almost as if it were a religious relic. This cult-like worship of objects celebrating an ironic, glamourized version of myth creates a separate myth in its own right.

The question remains: why is Ruga so focused on the idea of nationhood? According to an interview, Ruga, born in 1984 in Umtata, was deeply influenced by nationalist discourses in childhood. Ruga's father was a member of the Transksei government, which originally began as a Bantustan, or "homeland", and became an independent republic in 1976 as the Transkei National Independence Party was formed, although it was not recognized as a nation internationally.[30] Even while its economy depended on South Africa, and cases of corruption among its ruling party continued, the state's existence continued until 1994, when it was re-incorporated into South Africa, now known as the province of Eastern Cape.[31] Black Nationalist propaganda in Transkei as well as by the ANC and PAC in South Africa offered promises of a utopian future free of racial discrimination. Ruga mentions that "Azania was used as a dream to keep on this struggle."[32] His generation, spoon-fed the myth of the rainbow nation, eventually lead to his post-apartheid disillusionment.[33]

While analyzing the work of Beiruth and three other contemporary queer South African artists, Lima mentions that the artists "use queerness to appropriate symbols of apartheid power such as the land, spatial segregation, police, and political violence, […] making their symbols ambiguous, which weakens their oppressive power."[34] Ruga's Azania goes beyond appropriation, creating a new, queer nationalism, blurring the boundaries between performance/reality. Horowitz argues that performance theory, which often arranges "real life/imitation of life", or "offstage/onstage" as hierarchical, is unproductive as it ignores many cases in which the use of "performance" was used to craft "real" identity. In the *Azania Saga*, I would argue that Ruga uses the destabilized relationship between performance and reality to construct a new utopian South African Nationalism, one that lives up to the post-apartheid liberation narrative that he imagined in his childhood. Just like Jess, the drag king otherwise known as Xavier Alexander Jade who finds his trans-masculine identity through the performative medium of drag, Ruga uses the same medium to construct the ideal version of South African national identity.

In Horowitz' interpretation, "drag gives Jess the language, the permission, and the knowledge paradigm to name and embody his sense of self as a man."[35] Ruga's childhood of being "spoon-fed the rainbow nation" and dreaming of utopian nationhood informs his artistic practice, using queerness as a tool to imagine a subversive, ideal futurity.

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# (Re)presenting Riel-ity: The Ambivalence of Presenting and Performing Ideigientity on Stage in Early North Amercan 19th Century, Gabriel Dumont in Buffalo Bill's *Wild West Show* of 1886.

"I will not lay down my arms - I will fight forever."[1] Undefeated from commanding the political and military Métis resistance efforts at Fish Creek a month after the success at Duck Lake of March twenty-sixth, many brave men, women and young adults followed Adjutant General Gabriel Dumont who defended Batoche from the brutal attacks of the Dominion's armed forces who did not attempt to host peaceful negotiations and instead issued a hostile takeover. Located north-east of Saskatoon, Batoche is a Métis historic community where spiritual and political Métis leader, Louis Riel and treaty respected allies of First Nation Plains tribes and Assiniboine-Cree relatives fought alongside Gabriel Dumont's Provisional Government of Saskatchewan. The unexpected arrival of Mounted Police and the Dominion's coalition to surrender Batoche was a battle for the expansion of Canadian Imperial territory, resources, and to make room for the first initial stages of the Canadian Pacific Railway route. Prominent Métis communities inhabiting the Canadian Prairies extended as far as British Columbia to Manitoba, with the Métis migrating from Red River in Selkirk, Manitoba to Batoche in Saskatchewan and dispersed coast to coast after their diaspora in 1885. During that year, the Dominion negotiated with the Métis Provisional Government over rights, land and representative government within the Northwest.[2]

Instead, the Métis were cornered to resist the unexpected Canadian Imperial onslaught through the improvised makeshift weaponry of found objects and stockades, while also using the militant tactics from the hunts on the Bison Brigades throughout the North-western Great Plains of North America.[3] Despite the Métis' hard-fought efforts to defend Batoche and their families, fresh in the

minds of colonial cities and settlements was the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885, which supposedly ended the rebellious endeavors of the Métis of the western frontier. At this time, the romanticization of the Noble Savage became a staple in the imagining of a lawless and uncivilized western frontier, with the notable exception of legendary Indigenous leaders who survived historic battles, such as Métis adjutant general and governor Gabriel Dumont. William Frederick's "Buffalo Bill" Cody's *Wild West Show* recruited Gabriel Dumont in 1886 to embellish the exhibition's travelling performance by presenting notorious Indigenous and Métis contemporary key figures and exploiting their lived experiences to fulfill and make real the imagined frontier of the west. Dumont, who had a five-thousand-dollar bounty warranted against him only days after the Battle of Batoche, a year before became increasingly famous for his military renown. Michael Barnholden, historian and editor of the English interpretation of Grabiel Dumont's two French literary memoirs, the 2009 publication of *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, insists that while,

> [m]any do not understand [Dumont's] willingness to be "exploited" and "humiliated" by Buffalo Bill's [*Wild West Show*, in his perspective it] offers an opportunity to earn income, while displaying his prowess as a horseman and marksman - a prowess he takes for granted, as does he is proud mixed-blood heritage.[4]

However, I would like to argue that Dumont understood his significant position performing in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* to raise awareness of the Métis and their fight for socio-political recognition in Canada and beyond. Dr. Linda S. McNenly explains that this tactic, also known as transculturation, uses Ethnological zoos as a platform for demonstrating Indigenous resilience. Dumont's memoirs were dictated in the Oral Michif Tradition and elaborated on the events prior to, during and following the North-West Resistance.[5] Although it is possible that Gabriel Dumont was able to perform using Michif Oral Tradition in Cody's traveling theatrical exhibition, he may have enhanced the truth of the events he transcribed in his memoirs. He had the agency to advocate for Métis resilience, using his own experience to appeal to the pathos for the Métis resistance in order to disrupt colonial zones of intelligibility and utilize the Show as an act of transculturation. By shaping their own narratives within the performance, both on and off stage, Indigenous employees and their families were able to maintain adaptable and cultural survivance. This paper will

provide an analytical overview of Dumont's showmanship as part of a conscious effort in demonstrating Indigenous survivability, cultural agency and authenticate self-determined narratives—consequently subverting the colonial gaze of the Other.

## A FUGITIVE('S) MEMOIR

Gabriel Dumont is an accredited Métis folk hero of 1885, recognized as a disciplined and strategic leader who had the respect and admiration of his fellow Métis and First Nation compatriots from a young age. Born in the winter of 1837, throughout his early childhood and adult life Dumont witnessed the declining population of the North American bison while living on the western plains. Learning from his parents, Métis bison hunter Isidore Dumont and Louise Laframbroise, Gabriel mastered numerous languages belonging to several different First Nation territories, among which was Michif and French, yet was not a prominent English speaker. Growing up as a polyglot, Dumont was the eldest son of eleven children and was taught family responsibility while moving between Red River and Fort Pitt area, where his father became an independent trader.[6]

At a young age, he demonstrated dexterity in gunmanship, horse riding and First Nation customs, all the while nurturing an entrepreneurial charismatic spirit that was the result of living in the north-western prairies. The earliest written record of Dumont's unrivaled bravery and skill as an excellent marksman was in 1851 by Father Louis-François Richer Laflèche, a French-Catholic missionary who accompanied the hunting community at the conflict of Grand Coteau in the Minnesota Territory. At the age of thirteen, Gabriel successfully defended his Métis mobile encampment along the Medicine Line[7] during a conflict with a Siouian nation of South Dakota known as the Yanktonais.[8] Later, he was able to return with the guidance of his father to resolve the conflict through a "peace treaty between the two nations, and free passage on the North American prairie for Métis hunters and settlers."[9] The conflict of Grand Coteau demonstrates Dumont's first experience in practicing prairie warfare and Indigenous diplomacy, ultimately helping him in years to come when campaigning for First Nation allies during the spring battle of Batoche.

While in Montana in the summer of 1885, following the Battle of Batoche and Métis diaspora, Dumont had suffered the loss of his community. Although pardoned by the United States government, he was an exiled fugitive

alongside other Métis, Assiniboine and Saulteaux Cree, in addition to Lakota-Sioux veterans who allied together following the 1885 Battle of Batoche in what is now recognized as the Province of Saskatchewan on the basis of Michif-Cree kinship ties of *Wahkohtoowin.*[10] He was approached by Major John Burke who represented Colonel W. F. Cody "in the hope of recruiting Metis rebels to embellish the Buffalo Bill show [Dumont] merely expressed interest and postponed his decision." [11] However in contrast, other Métis political leaders in exile alongside Dumont, such as Micheal Dumas, a Métis leader during the Red River Resistance of 1870, readily accepted the position and would later travel with Cody's tour in Europe. Interestingly, it is debated among historians if Dumont ever went to France himself during the tours or individually between 1886 and 1889, as his memoirs inform his audience that he could not go to Europe as a result of the Dominion's bounty on his head.

Dumont, however, did not want to give up the search for Louis Riel and had hopes of resurrecting the Métis resistance movement by plotting Riel's escape from Middleton's militant search. Yet, due to the lack of telecommunication at the impact of General Frederick D. Middleton's violent and strategic method of coerced severance of the Métis and First Nation communities, Dumont was unable to continue his search for Riel who was tried and hanged on November fifteenth, 1885. In the spring of 1886, Dumont, having lost his wife from sickness and his people's nation, decided to join the performance which would propel him to transcontinental and international recognition, as The Hero of the Half-Breed Rebellion.[12] Colonel William Frederick Cody, born a Canadian, was an entrepreneurial veteran of the American Civil War, in addition, he was a notable bison hunter and gunslinger who saw economic opportunity in implementing his own *Wild West Show.*

These theatrical dramatizations and mobile Cabinets of Curiosities, were increasingly becoming part of the nineteenth century Victorian popular culture. Revolving around the romanticization of the Noble Savage, they also presented a unified imaginary of the western frontier, summed up as lawless, dangerous and filled with uncivilized excitement, providing the urban settlements of the American east an exotic narrative, complete with cigar container trading cards of portraits, parades, autograph auctions and even performances of mock-raids and bison hunts between the Indigenous and Settler performers in the dedicated arena.

## 'PLAYIN' TO THE GALLERY IN THE OLD STATES'

The Nobel Savage is a racial stereotype which presents Indigenous people as part of a static, monolithic warrior culture refusing to assimilate or adapt into Euro-American civilization. Simultaneously, their resistances were antagonized and idealized as a salvage narrative. Imperial ideologies such as Manifest Destiny and Terra Nullus were made to justify the horrendous and inhumane acts of Indigenous genocide committed by the European Imperial powers, yet poetically lamented the near extinction of the bison as a parallel symbolic metaphor to the vanishing polyethnic lifestyles of the plains.

Following the events of Grand Coteau, Dumont marries Madeleine Wilkie in 1858. She was the daughter of a chief of the hunt, brigade leader Jean-Baptise Wilkie, who witnessed Dumont's exceptional skills inherited from a proficient family of bison hunters. As an elected hunting chief during the seasonal polyethnic Bison Brigades, Dumont became an active leader in establishing a regulated court system, delivering justice, setting down laws and controlling the logistics of the bison hunt on a vast scale. To ensure the social security of a large mass of people, the hunting chief's leadership had to include aspects of martial governance and cultural awareness. Highly organized in nature, Bison Brigades were mobile communities consisting of women, men and children, as all were needed in the effort to produce, preserve and sustain the resources developed from bison-made products. By ensuring Métis land mobility after the Red River Expedition of 1870, Dumont became an elected president of the St. Laurent Commune as a settled local government that managed bison and pemmican trade and later appointed Batoche as the permanent settlement for the new Métis government in 1868.

Métis and First Nation relationships were incredibly tense due to the encroaching agricultural settlements of Canadian colonies on traditional bison hunting grounds and the restrictive cross-border trade regulations made between the Canadian Dominion and the United States government. "Struggles for access to European trade goods, bison, and horses determined much of the warfare on the northern plains,"[13] directly impacting the economic and social mobility of Indigenous peoples across the prairies. In forging long lasting alliances through peace treaties, gift giving and peace pipe ceremonies, these relationships would foster a shared interest in procuring bison materials and trading between both parties.

The bison population was widespread throughout the major biomes of North America and had a symbiotic relationship with Indigenous peoples. However, the arrival of Euro-American settlements carrying the ideologies of hunting for sport as well as trade caused the bison population to plummet rapidly. As a result, Indigenous peoples had to participate in the new economic climate of the colonial industry in order to compete for natural resources. The outcome of these negotiations was not always peaceful as hostilities between the two larger parties casted the Métis as the middlemen who would navigate between the two different worlds and their ways of knowing. The Indian Act, first introduced in North America in 1876, issued legal doctrines over Indigenous and Settler-Crown relations and was derived from Social Darwinian paternalistic ideology that perpetuates the practice of defining racial and social minorities as "Other." The creation of Indian reserves, status and non-status identification and the implementation of Canada's paramilitary North-west Mounted Police force supported Indian Agents to carry out Crown laws. This included the systematic removal of Indigenous cultural and social customs such as Potlatch Bans in the west, dispossessed nations of their ancestral territories through the numbered Treaty land claims, separated families from their children and made attempts to discourage the practice of Oral Traditions through placing Indigenous children, including Metis children, in Indian Residential Schools. Through this, the Dominion had created wards of the state—objectifying Indigenous people through the colonial gaze of the Noble Savage and perceiving Indigenous people as the personification of the Sublime, casting them as both harmonious friends and terrifying enemies to colonizers.

Historian Linda McNenly describes this contested ideological paradigm of racial discourse as the foe-to-friend narrative. In fact, McNenly states that *Wild West Shows* were a direct result of presenting a "conquest narrative, therefore, also entailed discourses of *friendship* and peace, which supported the fact that Native peoples were no longer a threat, that is, no longer a foe,"[14] and were used to emphasize a utopic, paternalistic doctrine supported by nationalism in North America. Tatanka Iyotake, known as Sitting Bull to the Euro-Americans, was a prominent Lakota chieftain of the Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux and was made infamous for successfully leading the resistance over U.S General George Custer's forces in Little Big Horn in Dakota territory during 1876. By displaying fierce tactics during the battle, Sitting Bull became recognized as a fearsome and deadly leader whose notoriety crossed above and

beyond the Medicine Line as he made his way to Saskatchewan in Cypress Hills. Like Dumont, he was actively sought out and later approached by William F. Cody as Buffalo Bill who requested his presence as part of his vision for the Wild West ethnological exposition. Sitting Bull (including other Indigenous leaders such as Dumont) would have to pose in their traditional regalia, often displaying his medals or coded items of honor, and was usually standing in front of a stylized painting of the Great Plains. As seen in the daguerreotype photograph *Sitting Bull and William F. Cody* c.1880-1890, both Sitting Bull and Cody were positioned to face each other equally, with both of their dominant hands outstretched as a



Fig. 1. Unknown photographer. *Buffalo Bill and William F. Cody*, c.1880- 1890, daguerreotype photograph, 3.62 x 5.5 inches, Buffalo Bill Center of the West Archives.

symbolic gesture of recognition and peace. Yet, Cody still holds onto a military sabre in caution. This may reflect colonial attitudes at the time where Indigenous peoples were perceived as untrustworthy allies.

Cody understood that by including notorious Indigenous leaders as living heroes and historic figures, along with the portrayal of Indigenous people and their families, would ultimately present a supposed authentic and contextualized performance of their lived experiences in the Western territories. With the inclusion of Gabriel Dumont, "who was understood to be the most dangerous of the [Métis "rebels"] and the most efficient killer,"[15] Cody promised his audience a thrilling and phenomenal show. Yet, this is not to say that the Indigenous people did not have their own self-determined agency while employed in staged expositions, including Gabriel Dumont himself. Sourja Moll identifies that zones of intelligibility "operate through the media to cultivate a specific national pathos,"[16] therefore creating a representational image of the Other to entertain the colonial gaze and subvert Indigenous resilience. Yet, scholars argue about the ambivalence surrounding Indigenous employment as show Indians, proposing that many saw it as a way to economically sustain their way of life during the Indian Act.

McNenly explains that socio-cultural benefits were included in performing for a Euro-American audience, since it "facilitated [Indigenous] participants' cultural survival."[17] However, this creates a dichotomy between Indigenous agency and the Noble Savage concept. Primarily, hired Indigenous people were able to shape and design their own self-determined narrative within the performances, " [exerting] *expressive* agency—the ability to express and experience personal meanings of [Indigenous] identity."[18] The Indian Act sought to ban cultural expression and traditions within Indigenous communities and by being a semi-acting individual representing Indigenous identity, "performers adopted the performance encounter in response to their new living conditions as a space for the continuation of [culture] associated with a *modified* warrior identity,"[19] effectively concealing their act of resilience and adaptability. Despite being subjected to the colonial audience, First Nation performers were able to bring their families with them and live in family groups. This gave them the opportunity to speak openly in their language and practice their cultural customs thereby transmitting Oral Traditions such as histories, songs, medicines and teachings without the oppressive censorship of an Indian Agent present. However, it is important to note that while Indigenous performers could actively

engage in their own cultures as part of demonstrating their identity within ethnological expositions, they were not respected under the colonial gaze but celebrated as commercialized appropriation to further a colonial narrative. It is important to note that Indigenous performers themselves were not naive to the fact that they were entertainers who transformed Eurocentric romanticization of Indigenous people into reality.

## CAN I GET A PICTURE WITH YOU, GABE?

As Barnholden notes, "Gabriel recited his own history - and Métis history - with great dignity."[20]  Although it is possible that Gabriel Dumont was able to perform using Michif Oral Tradition to demonstrate Métis way of life on the Plains and their gunslinging skills, he may have embellished the truth of the events he transcribed to manipulate colonial zones of intelligibility by making his stories more outlandish and heroic. In addition to historical storytelling, he may have shared Métis matrilocal[21] folk culture and successfully expressed the values of Métis socio-political customs and their cause for political sovereignty. Furthermore, Dumont may have also intentionally demonstrated the ideals of Métis masculinity as a former chief of the hunt to gain attraction from the male Euro-American audience which could later be used as a vote of support during his political campaigns in Montréal and New York.

Weighing up to seven hundred to twenty-two hundred pounds, fully matured bison were difficult to hunt and required adept skill of command and quick wit. "Depending on the speed and agility of a horse and rider, a skilled hunter could hope for ten kills [of bison], while the less experienced could manage two or three,"[22] and it was often a treacherous endeavour for an inexperienced hunter. *Le Petit*, Dumont's rifle, became a recognized symbol of Dumont's prowess as an expert marksman and disciplined warrior and he was often photographed with it by his side to emphasize his dangerous appeal. McNenly states that as performers in the Wild West Show, Indigenous people gained recognition and status and suggests that "their status was also a result of their involvement in significant historical events,"[23] or demonstrate their day to day activities, such as orchestrated bison hunts within Buffalo Bill's rodeo stadium. Therefore, Dumont's public recognition through the colonial gaze "accorded [him] the status of 'War Chief,' "[24] for being the General leader of an organized and militarized Indigenous resistance. Matthew Barrett summarizes that while settler audiences "rejected the Métis political cause for which he

fought, many Canadians nevertheless asserted that Dumont represented an ideal definition of masculine vigour and strength,"[25] I argue that it is possible Dumont would have had the opportunity to gain some sympathetic listeners during the troupe's travels in North America.

Ultimately, by nature of changing the colonial narrative through performing on a colonized platform, Gabriel Dumont was able to publicly "speak to the issues raised by Louis Riel's hanging for treason"[26] when he traveled between Montreal and New York after he was granted amnesty in the summer of 1886 for political campaigns. Historian George Woodcock informs readers that during this time, "[Dumont] began to understand how the consequences of the rebellion, and especially of Riel's death, had become woven into the political map of Canada."[27] As Woodcock illustrates, through the new political platform Dumont issued, that the Métis of the Saskatchewan Council, formerly the Métis Provisional Government of Saskatchewan, should receive financial compensation and repatriation of their land scrips from the Canadian Dominion. Dumont was evidently aware that he had the power to "[expose] the injustices endured by the Métis, evidently assuming that his words would seem as fearful as his famous gun."[28] It is interesting to note that also during this time, Dumont wanted to facilitate a similar travelling exhibit not unlike Buffalo Bill's Wild West, "but adapted to the French taste and manned by Canadian Metis and Indians."[29] Perhaps, this is because Dumont saw the socio-cultural significance of Canadian Indigenous representation by Indigenous leaders themselves.

Sitting Bull and Dumont were actively aware of how the Friend- foe narrative, known as transculturation, "emphasizes how Others adopt colonial relationships in a dialogical process, not only to reproduce them, thereby negotiating power and agency."[30] In order to disrupt the colonial zones of intelligibility formulated in the eastern settlements of North America, Dumont wished to demonstrate Indigenous survivability, understanding that a Canadian *Wild West Show* itself could be designated as a platform for the transculturation of the Métis and Indigenous, and consequently subverting the colonial gaze of the Other. Nevertheless, Dumont proved to be unsuccessful in gaining the long-lasting attention of his French-Canadian and American listeners as "[Dumont] had none of the charismatic exaltation [of] Riel [...] and his interpretation of the Metis defeat—which was his own—was unwelcome to many of them."[31] Perhaps this is the reason why Dumont returned to *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*

*Show*, in order to demonstrate the stronger qualities "that made him an inimitable leader in the extreme situations offered by buffalo hunts and guerilla warfare."[32]

Christi Belcourt's re-illustrated image of Dumont's photo with decorated borders of the canvas and distinct Métis floral beadwork in imitation of painted dot art juxtaposed with the imitation backdrop of Cody with Sitting Bull's black and white photograph, Belcourt presents a lively portrait of Dumont, with iconographic flowers which represent the natural environment of the Plains. Instead of a stand-off between two ethnic nations, Belcourt chooses to have the viewer meet with Dumont eye-to-eye, in a seated relaxed position with both hands open, in contrast to the cautious guard of *Le Petit*. His gaze is fixed on the viewer as much as the viewer's gaze observes him. Her acrylic rendition of his portrait brings Dumont to the present, as if at any moment, Gabriel Dumont could launch into telling one of his heroic exploits or simply, addressing you with a courteous greeting in Michif.

Oral Tradition was often looked at with disdain among privileged Euro-American settler communities who believed that the conquest of Indigenous peoples brought civilization to the Indigenous and Half-Breed people who were thought to be racially and intellectually inferior. Yet, even long after the massacre of Batoche in 1885 and following his efforts made during the 1880's, Dumont certainly upheld his promise, not only to the Métis community and to his brother in law Moïse Oullette, that he would continue to fight forever, but also to himself. Even without the use of armed action, Dumont learned that not all acts of resistance could be made possible through warfare. In fact, he was able to communicate Métis history through the Métis oral tradition and build the recognition of Métis resilience and right to freedom through performing in Buffalo Bill's *Wild West Show*. Upon his return to Batoche, he dictated two memoirs between 1888 and 1903, and welcomed an agricultural lifestyle with his remaining relatives until dying from natural causes, three years later in 1906. By the time of his arrival back home to Batoche, his efforts were well known by the Métis community— a continued recognition that has regarded him as a revered Métis folk hero veteran and an icon of Métis transcultural perseverance.

Fig. 2. Christi Belcourt. *Can I Get A Picture With You Gabe?* c. 2010, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 48 inches, Gabriel Dumont Institute Art Collection.

## ENDNOTES

1. Gabriel Dumont. *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*. (Vancouver: Talonbooks Limited, 2009), 89.
2. Ibid., 45.
3. "Metis bison hunting brigades were mobile villages that travelled great distances across the Plains in pursuit of their prey. Their well-organized formations, careful adherence to rules, and strong social order do not mean they were militaristic patriarchies looking to wage wars on their competitors. The village model of the hunt encouraged all to avoid violence both outside and within the brigade. The strict rules of the hunts helped secure community order." Émilie Pigeon and Carolyn Podruchny, "The Mobile Village: Metis Women, Bison Brigades, and Social Order on the Nineteenth-Century Plains" *Unrest, Violence, and the Search for Social Order in British North America*, edited by Elizabeth Mancke, Scott See, Jerry Bannister, and Denis McKim (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 26.
4. Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 25.
5. I would like to acknowledge that acts of rebellions of the Métis recorded within Canadian history will be referenced as resistances in order to

demonstrate the resilience of the Métis people due to their active and ongoing resistance from colonial assimilation and the misrepresentation of antagonizing the Métis people.

6.   Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 21.
7.   The 49th parallel, also known as the Medicine Line, was established to demarcate the negotiated geopolitical land survey agreement under the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 Treaty between the British Imperial Empire and the American Government.
8.   Pigeon and Podruchny, "The Mobile Village,"3.
9.   Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks,* 41.
10.  Although there are many spellings of the Michif-Cree concept of *Wahkotwoowin*, it is a Cree cultural concept that best represents how family, place and economic realities were historically interconnected, the expression of a worldview that laid out a system of social, cultural and economic obligation and mutual responsibility between related individuals to form alliances.
11.  George Woodcock and J.R. Miller. *Gabriel Dumont: the Métis Chief and his lost world.* (New York: Broadview Press, 2003), 234.
12.  Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 24.
13.  Pigeon and Podruchny, "The Mobile Village,"13.
14.  Linda Scarangella McNenly. "Foe, Friend, Or Critic: Native Performers with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and Discourses of Conquest and Friendship in Newspaper Reports." *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 38 no. 2. Spring: 2014. (York University: ProQuest Ebook Central, 2019), 147.
15.  Adam C. Grieve. "Wild West Canada: Buffalo Bill and Transborder History/Dissertation." (University of Saskatchewan Press, 2016), 68.
16.  Sourja Moll. "Zones of Intelligibility: The Trial of Louis Riel and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Media/ Dissertation." (Montréal: Concordia University Press, 2013), iii.
17.  Linda Sarangella McNenly. "Chapter Three: Performing in Wild West Shows, Representing and Experiencing Native Identity." *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 89.
18.  McNenly, "Chapter Three: Performing in Wild West Shows," 78.
19.  Ibid., 79.
20.  Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 33.
21.  The kinship the Métis shared with the north-western First Nation communities through the connection of Fur Trader marriages, 'á la façon du pays.'
22.  Pigeon and Podruchny, "The Mobile Village," 1.
23.  McNenly, "Chapter Three: Performing in Wild West Shows," 83.
24.  Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 32.
25.  Matthew Barret. "Hero of the Half-Breed Rebellion: Gabriel Dumont and Late Victorian Military Masculinity." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 48 no. 3. Fall: 2014. (York University: ProQuest Ebook Central, 2019), 80.
26.  Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, 17.
27.  Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont,* 241.
28.  Ibid., 242.
29.  Ibid., 244.
30.  McNenly. "Chapter Three: Performing in Wild West Shows," 78.
31.  Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont*, 246.
32.  Ibid., 245.

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# Egypt; an Ancient Civilization's Effect on Modern Politics

One of the ways a state expresses its political identity is through its treatment of history. In the case of Egypt, political periods can be viewed by their approach to their ancient heritage. Looking back at Egyptian history scholars have separated ancient Egypt into periods such as Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, etc. each distinct due to cultural and political changes. For this study, I have applied the same premise to Egypt's recent history. The periods of colonialism (1798-1922), pharaonic nationalism (1922-1940), and authoritarianism (1952-2011) are distinctive in their treatment of ancient Egypt. These periods can be analyzed via the particular way in which they treat antiquity through the culture of their objects— including antiquities themselves as well as revolutionary murals— and the culture of their museums in ways that respond to trends unique to each period. Each of these periods used ancient Egypt for political gain, creating a disconnect between Egyptians and their history. The effects of which will influence Egypt's political future following the 2011 revolution.

## COLONIALISM

In 1798 Napoleon invaded the Egyptian province of the Ottoman Empire, intending to disrupt British trade to India.[1] However, Napoleon also brought scholars as well as soldiers. These academics were tasked with the documentation of Egyptian antiquities, which would eventually be published in the *Description de l'Égypte*. The first edition of the *Description*, published in 1809, embodies the orientalist perspective of the time that allowed Europe to view ancient Egypt as a source of European civilization, while also disparaging its current state.

Egyptian antiquities and monuments are fundamentally an expression of their religion. In order to fold ancient Egypt's differing religion into Europe's narrative of civilization, common ground was found through shared stories. Not yet having the ability to read any texts, this interpretation and identification was primarily done through images. The goddess Isis, who was often shown being suckled by her son Horus, matched European images of the Virgin Mary and Christ. Similarly, Osiris' images of death and resurrection could parallel Christ's. Even the Ankh, the symbol for life, is strikingly similar to the image of the crucifix. These ancient Egyptian similarities to European culture were juxtaposed with contemporary Egyptians who, in the opinion of Napoleon's troops by comparison to ancient Egyptians, were "plunged into barbarism".[2] This supposed devolution justified the right of France to rule over 18th century Egypt as its cultural superior.

By 1801, after three years of French occupation, the British intervened and assisted the Ottoman Empire in removing French troops. This cooperation was not necessarily reflective of an ongoing alliance, but rather a temporary mutual political interest. For its success, Britain was rewarded with Ancient Egyptian antiquities,[3] most notably the Rosetta Stone, which even today is a centrepiece of the British Museum. Not yet able to economically rely on exports like cotton, antiquities were the first resources extracted from Egypt. Officially, Egypt was a province of the Ottoman empire and functioned as an autonomous state with Ottoman governors.[4] No longer under Western control, Egypt still maintained its relationship with the west economically and for the next 34 years, Egyptian antiquities continued to flow into foreign collections.

In 1835, Muhammad Ali, Egypt's governor, stopped the export of antiquities. He attributed the "despoliation of antiquities" to the Europeans.[5] This decree called for antiquities to be collected and has been cited as the beginning of the Egyptian Antiquities Service. However, the decree was intended more so for political purposes than for a reclamation of Egyptian heritage. Europe's disdain for contemporary Egypt was something Muhammad Ali believed could be rectified by adopting a European model, an idea encouraged by Europe. This included the model of museums, Muhammad Ali saying "Europeans have buildings for keeping antiquities...Such establishments bring great

renown to the countries that have them".[6] The collection impressed upon Europe the ability of Egypt to 'civilize' while politically it functioned as "a convenient repository from which to take gifts for visiting (European) dignitaries".[7] Such use suggests that the value of the collected antiquities to Egypt was not only as a source of national pride and identity but also as a political tool. The restriction of exports only increased the value of antiquities as diplomatic gifts. This trading of Egypt's past for its future was not hidden. Relics of Egypt, like obelisks, were given as gifts to France, England, and the emerging power of America "in exchange for the new civilization of which she [France] had spread in the Orient".[8] The government on the receiving end of antiquities bought symbols of power and control while Egypt moved towards Europe's idea of civilization.

This Western ownership of ancient Egypt existed on Egyptian soil as well. The Antiquities Service was officially established in 1858 by the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette. The appointment of a Frenchmen to the management of Egypt's ancient history was not an anomaly as Egyptians were commonly excluded from political and academic positions.[9] At least in theory, Mariette did have an "Egyptian audience in mind".[10] Museum guides were translated into Arabic and emphasized the henotheistic nature of Egyptian worship.[11] However, when the current Egyptian Antiquities museum in Cairo was built in 1902, the façade reflected the same European lens that decorated the frontispiece of the *Description de l'Égypte*. In aesthetics the columns, drapery, and writing that decorate the outside of the Egyptian museum even today follow the unseen European structure in Egyptology that had begun with the *Description*.

## PHARAONIC NATIONLISM

At the onset of World War I in 1914, Britain took control of Egypt in order to protect their own political interests. This was motivated by fear of the Ottoman Empire's alliance with the Central Powers, and Egypt's geostrategic importance for access to other British colonies. Established as a protectorate and ruled under martial law, Egypt was used as "the launching point for both the Gallipoli and Syrian Campaigns, [this] meant that the material and human resources of the country were harnessed to the service of the Allied war effort".[12]

Post-WWI, Britain's depleted resources, along with an increasingly rebellious population in Egypt and its other colonies, pushed them to declare Egypt independent in February of 1922. The term independence was loosely used at this point as Britain retained control over any Egyptian governmental department considered important to British security, such as imperial communications.[13] Unlike other Middle Eastern states that were created by the Sykes-Picot agreement, Egypt was "a distinctive territorial entity with its own history and character".[14]

In November, only nine months after independence, the extraordinary archeological discovery of the first intact Egyptian royal tomb, that of Tutankhamun, opened a door for Pharaonic Nationalism. Also called Pharaonism, this political identity uses the territorial entity of ancient Egypt as a source of national identity and legitimacy for a modern Egyptian state. Despite the limitations that semi-independence imposed, the prime minister, Saad Zaghloul, embraced pharaonic nationalism politically. He declared that the content of Tutankhamun's tomb must remain in Egypt's borders as "it is the right of a government to defend the rights and dignity of the nation".[15] Tutankhamun became not only the first intact royal tomb, but the first whose funerary goods also remained in Egypt.

Despite the power of asserting such ownership over ancient Egyptian history, pharaonic nationalism's power quickly diminished. The power of Ancient Egypt as a political symbol was something Britain had anticipated. Prior to independence, the Egyptian school system, under British control, had "avoided the teaching of ancient Egyptian history".[16] And, as previously mentioned, it excluded Egyptians from participation in the Antiquities Service. Restricting the Egyptians' knowledge of their own historical independence served two purposes. First, it hid potential grounds for a claim to independence. Second, it gave Britain the opportunity to further appropriate pharaonic history as its own. Ancient Egypt had become a part of the European narrative of civilized development, something that Egypt depended on Britain to teach. This limited knowledge of its own history was a barrier that prevented the application of a Muslim or Arab lens of understanding to be applied to ancient Egypt.

The possibility of Muslims' (of an iconoclastic and monotheistic faith) understanding the ancient Egyptian religion (semiotic and polytheistic) has been dismissed as incompatible. However, perhaps this has less to do with the differences between European and Arab lenses of interpretation than of a lack of scholarship. Muslim scholars had long attempted to rectify this neglect by using the Quran, the Hadith, and Islamic scholars' references to Egypt. The story of Sage Shaikh Abu Zakaria al-Biyasi, a teacher from the 15th century, directly refers to the importance of ancient Egypt to the concept of knowledge. This teacher is cited as having said to a student upon the latter's return from a trip to Egypt, "Despicable is the student of knowledge and wisdom whose endeavour does not arouse his determination to see the like [of the pyramids]".[17]

Islamic interest in Egypt has also been connected to the Pharaoh's representation in the Bible. While the Pharaoh of the Exodus is a notoriously unjust leader, there is debate among Muslim scholars about his conversion to Islam. In the Quran, when dying the Pharaoh says, "I believe that there is no God but the one in whom the Israelites believe and I am one of the Moslems".[18] Perhaps this conversion, however late, is the reason the Hadith says "Blessing was divided into ten parts, nine for Egypt and one part for the other lands".[19] If so, the blessings given to Egypt are not isolated to Islamic Egypt but are also a reason for the prosperity and knowledge of the ancient Egyptians.

### AUTHORITARIANISM

By 1952, the limitations Britain had put on Egyptian independence were removed by a *coup d'état*. This revolution established a new type of independence for the Egyptian state and brought with it a new identity. This event established a new era of rulers; Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. Linked by their authoritarian rule and military history prior to politics, these looming figures of Egypt became the modern equivalent of pharaohs.

Despite the pharaonic allusion used in Egypt's authoritarian era, this period did not look to its ancient history for an identity. Instead, this political period "reproduces narratives about Egyptian history that are far more colonial and orientalist than any nineteenth-century colonial orientalist could ever have dreamed".[20] Nasserism, the political

ideology emphasizing equality, socialism, security, and the pan-Arabism introduced by the new government, had no place for pharaonic Egypt. Ancient Egypt became a product, packaged and marketed to global interests; a cultural cash crop for both Egypt and an international market. Unsuccessful politically, Ancient Egypt "would at the least fulfill a monetary function if handed over to the foreign visitors".[21] The result was that the Ministry of Antiquities became the only government department required to be self-funding which further motivated the management of ancient history for profit.[22]

This monetary incentive was not isolated to museums or traveling exhibits; Ancient Egypt was harnessed as an income source by the Egyptian people as well. In 1996, under the rule of Hosni Mubarak, the government and its people came head to head on the ownership of the ancient Egypt that exists outside museum walls. This took the form of the decision to evict the population living in the town of Gurna, a town in modern day Luxor that was constructed on top of the Valley of the Nobles. Today's estimated population of 7,388[23] is the result of Gurna being the home of "these rascally fellahs" since the 1800s.[24] Suzanne Mubarak, the president's wife, said of the eviction, "If some villagers have to be removed in order to save our heritage, that does not mean we don't care for individuals. On the contrary we are giving them a better alternative with complete service".[25] Like the government itself, the people of Gurna relied economically on its ancient history through destructive looting or the business of tourists.

Regardless of what was the stronger motive, protection of heritage or profit, the decision to evict the Gurnawis shows the problems that the Egyptian people faced on the ground. The European models of historical institutions that were imposed in the study of Egyptology have been unable to address the difference in Egyptian experience; "here history all melds into one".[26] Economically, this posed a problem that the eviction of the Gurna tried to rescue. By removing the living Egyptians, "tourists are spared the sort of encounters and negotiations that once characterized visiting communities like Gurna: people begging, children trying to sell dolls, people offering services etc.".[27] In order to preserve significant archeological sites, it may be necessary to resettle a population. However, it must be recognized how integral ancient Egypt

is for the Gurnawis in terms of ancestral homes, and economy. Removing Gurnawis from the valley is not just protection of a site, it is the protection of an image accomplished by sanitizing the present reality for the sake of government profit and international attraction.

The 2011 Egyptian revolution is a clear break from the period of authoritarian rule, but it cannot yet be definitively characterized as a necessarily successful revolution. What can be analyzed from this, however, is how this period of Egyptian history relates to its ancient history and what that suggests for possible political outcomes for Egypt going forward.

The Egyptian Museum of Antiquities was a centre of international gaze during the protests in Tahir Square. This was not just due to the many cameras pointing at areas including the square, the Egyptian Museum, and the headquarters of the National Democratic Party, but there was a sense of international concern for the irreplaceable history that the revolution was putting at risk. This concern was not without reason, as roughly fifty items were stolen and others damaged.[28] However, concern about the museum's contents did not seem to extend too much beyond antiquities. Much harder to find are the reports that, "the military are alleged to have used the Egyptian Antiquities Museum as a detention and interrogation center...Earning it the soubriquet *salakhana*, 'torture chamber'".[29] Already having been disconnected and excluded historically from the institution, the use of the Museum as a *salakhana* could only deepen this divide. Built to celebrate Egypt's ancient history these antiquities are now witnesses to the further political alienation of peoples from their own past.

What makes the 2011 revolution distinct from the Free Officers Coup of 1952, is the movement's diversity. There was no political objective for inserting a specific new power regime as there was in 1952; the only demands were bread, freedom, and social justice, which were made by a diverse group of Egyptians. Political rulers had emerged from the dust like Mohamed Morsi and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. However, neither has fulfilled the goals that brought a diversity of Egyptians to the streets. Therefore, to get a sense of how today's Egyptians relate to their ancient history we must look beyond the wall of the *Salakhana* and to the streets where this

Fig. 1. Alaa Awad, *Untitled*, Mohammed Mahmoud Street, Cairo. November 2011

revolution began.

In such periods of authoritarianism, the images projected onto the public via murals, portraits, and other public government sponsored works, work to make an extreme situation normal and unchallenable.[30] The street art of the 2011 revolution attempted to break this type of state control. Reflective of the diversity of peoples gathered against the government, the street art preserved in books like *Walls of Freedom* combines elements of Western, Islamic, Coptic, and pharaonic imagery in order to assert an image of the Egyptian people as they see themselves and not how the state represents them. On one wall, pharaonic Egypt— represented as the smiting scene of Rameses II— is surrounded by Arabic graffiti as well as the stenciled face of Samira Ibrahim, one of the many women of the revolution subjected to virginity tests (Fig. 1).[31] What is evidenced by Egyptian street art like this is its ability to reconcile a multiplicity of identities and a diverse history into the Egyptian identity. Unfortunately, however, these images no longer exist. The revolutionary art which represented Egyptians as they saw themselves and their culture has been painted over by the authorities. Today when going to visit the Egyptian museum there is no visual memory of the revolution

that took place in the square or the torture that took place in the Egyptian Antiquities Museum; it has all been replaced by a new parking lot.

## CONCLUSION

Each period, colonialism, pharaonic nationalism, and authoritarianism used ancient Egypt for their own political interest through trade and museum culture, the legacy of which is a disconnect between Egyptians and their own history. However, the pharaonic street art created by Egyptian revolutionaries shows an awareness of ancient Egyptian culture and an ability to reconnect with their history in a unique and vital way. Pharaonic street art demonstrates the possibility of a reclamation of ancient Egyptian history alongside a reclamation of political control over Egypt's future.

## ENDNOTES

[1.] Prior to the creation of the Suez Canal, the Saini peninsula was used as a land route to access the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trade routes. Janmansson, Martin. "Medieval Trade Route Networks." *EasyZoom*, 18 May 2018, easyzoom.com/imageaccess/ec482e04c2b240d4969c14156bb6836f.

[2.] Reid, Donald M. *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Print. 34.

[3.] Article 16 of the Capitulation of Alexandria which gave the British ownership of everything acquired in Egypt including antiquities. Parkinson, Richard. *Cracking Codes: the Rosetta Stone and Decipherment:* University of California Press, 1999. 21.

[4.] Cleveland, William L., and Martin P. Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East.* 5th ed., Westview Press, 2013. 59-60.

[5.] Reid, *Whose Pharaohs*, 55.

[6.] Reid, *Whose Pharaohs*, 55-56.

[7.] Wilkinson, Toby. *The Nile: A Journey Downriver Through Egypt's Past and Present.* 2014. 255.

[8.] Jeffreys, D G. *Views of Ancient Egypt Since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations.* London: UCL Press, 2003, 61.

[9.] Hassan, F A, L S. Owens, Trafford A. De, and Okasha E. Daly. *The Management of Egypt's Cultural Heritage.* 2015, 8.

[10.] Reid, *Whose Pharaohs*, 106.

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[12.] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East.* 179.

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28. Halime, Farah. "Revolution Brings Hard Times for Egypt's Treasures." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 31 Oct. 2012.

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30. Shenker, *The Egyptians*, 361.

31. Hamdy, Basma, et al. *Walls of Freedom Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution.* FROM HERE TO FAME Publishing, 2014. 171.

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An Abridged Printing of:

# Desacralization in Moscow Conceptual and Western Art[1]

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars and artists[2] often describe Moscow Conceptual art as "provincial" or "local" implying its isolation and distinctness from the Western art scene. The proponents of this point of view distinguish Moscow Conceptualism from Western art, arguing that it is too particular to Soviet daily life, that its very name restricts it to specific geographic boundaries, and that geopolitics kept it too isolated from the West. But perhaps labelling Moscow Conceptualism as provincial overstates its distinctness from Western art. In this paper, I will argue that Moscow Conceptual art is concerned with the same approaches, artistic views, agendas, and techniques as art movements in Western Europe and North America of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The key aspects that unite modern and contemporary art from the West with Moscow Conceptual art are intermediality, desacralization, and collaboration among artists.

While such artistic views and agendas of modern and contemporary art were established in the early to mid-twentieth century, these same views and agendas emerged in Moscow Conceptualism only in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite short periods of thaw, liberalism, and openness to the West between 1930s and 1980s, Russia or the Soviet Union witnessed serious social changes, authoritarian regimes, repressions, and political isolation from the Western world. Obviously, these historical circumstances did not allow for synchronic developments of art in the Soviet Union—where Soviet Realism predominated— with the art of the West. However, I believe, that in spite of different historical

Fig. 1. *MANI Folio 4 1982, Folio 4, 1982*, Original item located at the Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, M.A.N.I. Collection FSO 01-066.

and socio-economic contexts, Western art and Moscow Conceptualism have general similarities. Currently, it is hard to conclude whether the Moscow conceptualists consciously borrowed from Western movements or whether particular historical contexts simply prompted these Russian artists to revisit similar artistic views and agendas that were being explored much earlier both in Western art and in Russian art prior to Stalin's regime.[3]

In this paper, I will use Moscow Conceptual artworks displayed in the Moscow Archive of New Art (MANI).[4] MANI was established in 1980 by artist Andrei Monastyrskii and poet Lev Rubinstein.[5] The archive consists of five *papki*, or folios (fig. 1), each containing between thirty and fifty envelopes made by individual Moscow Conceptual artists and artistic groupings between 1980 and 1982.[6] The MANI folios helped circulate the Moscow Conceptualist's artworks, which, as unofficial art, were not exhibited in museums or published in official journals.

## INTERMEDIALITY

Intermediality, especially in the form of experimentation with image and text, is one of the major preoccupations of twentieth century art. Both Western twentieth-century artworks and MANI artworks combine visual, literary and linguistic mediums using semiotics, humor, and artifice.

## INTERMEDIALITY AND SEMIOTICS

The American Joseph Kosuth was influenced by principles of semiotics when creating his most famous work *One and Three Chairs* in 1965.[7] He experimented with the idea of representation by exhibiting a chair in three different ways – installing a physical chair, a photograph of a chair, and a definition of a chair – an object, an image, and text. The signified stays the same but the signifier changes. This artwork raises a lot of questions about the issues of representation such as "What is the most accurate representation of the chair?" and "How are these forms of representation connected to each other?"

The title of the work, *One and Three Chairs*, is also a linguistic game that raises questions about the problematics around the original idea and an imitation. Kosuth was likely influenced by the essay "Rhetoric of the Image" by semiotician Roland Barthes (1964). In this essay, Barthes raised a question about whether images can truly function as conveyers of meaning given that they are essentially imitations.[8] "One" in the title of Kosuth's artwork likely stands for the original "idea" or "concept" of the chair – chair as a "sign" – while "three" stands for the three copies or three representations of the chair – chairs as signifiers. This separation of one chair from the three chairs separates the original idea from the three imitations. By doing so Kosuth wanted to highlight that an imitation never equals the original, as an imitation is only a replica of the original.

Zhigalov's Investigation of the Circle series from folio 4 is also rooted in semiotics. Similar to other conceptualists, Zhigalov experimented with the relationship between a signifier and different types of signified. A linguist by training, he grounded his experimentation more particularly in the use of Russian language and Soviet socio-cultural contexts. In this series, he used words that have "circle" as their root
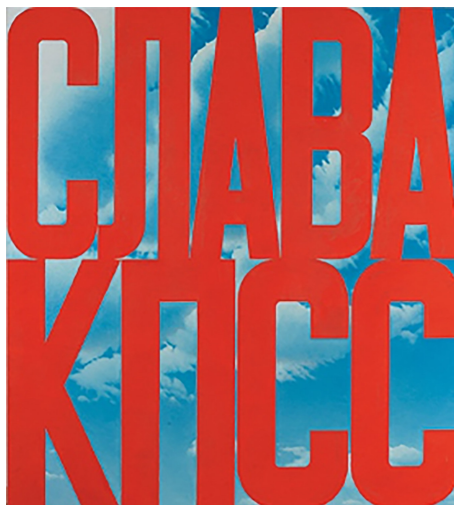
Fig. 2. Erik Bulatov, *Slava KPSS (Glory to the CPSU),* Folio 1, 1981, Original item located at the Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, M.A.N.I. Collection FSO 01–066.

and placed them in distinct contexts to produce different associations for Russian speaking viewers. For instance, in the work *Kru-u-u-gom* from the Investigation of the Circle series the word "krugom", translated as "turn around", contains the root "krug", which means "circle". Investigation of the Circle series in folio 4 contains a photograph of the work *Kru-u-u-gom*, which is a white piece of paper that has the phrase Кругом! Шагом марш ("Kru-u-u-gom! Shagom marsh!") written in the centre. "Krugom" refers to a military command that any Russian speaking person living in the Soviet Union at that time would immediately recognize. It is particularly interesting how the word "krugom" is spelt "kru-u-u-gom!". This type of spelling accurately portrays the elongation of the "u" sound that would be typical to hear from an officer in the Russian army. This evokes an auditory reflex that encourages the viewer to pronounce it this way in one's head-first and then remember how this word is pronounced in the military context.

Similar to Zhigalov, Erik Bulatov experimented with signs, signifiers and signified. Folio 4 contains a photograph of the painting *Slava KPSS or Glory to the CPSU* (fig. 2) by Bulatov, which depicts the

phrase "Slava KPSS" written in large red capital letters across blue sky background. Bulatov took a political slogan— a sign— and inserted it into a new visual context in order to create a new signified. This artistic choice creates a sense of the letters as a window through which someone is looking at the outside world. The sky is symbolic of a free space, and the letters are symbolic of a physical obstacle that separates a person, who is locked inside, from becoming free. Despite the physical obstruction, the freedom can still leak out into the interior restricted space. The use of Bulatov's colors additionally highlights this juxtaposition between freedom and non-freedom, locked or obstructed space. In addition to referencing the Soviet political system in the "Slava KPSS" phrase in the centre of the artwork, Bulatov included political connotation in the use of colors. According to Bulatov, blue symbolizes freedom, and red is characteristic of the communist ideology.[9]

All these artists were concerned with the principles of semiotics and the production and evolution of meaning through visual and textual means. They were all interested in the relationship between the sign, signifier, and signified, however, these artists viewed this process differently. They each had different levels of reliance on certain linguistic, social, and political contexts. Kosuth did not rely on the viewers' knowledge of any specific contexts, while Zhigalov and Bulatov did. No one without an advanced knowledge of Russian language and Russian military life would be able to grasp the idea behind the auditory pun - "kru-u-u-gom!". While all aspects of Kosuth and Skersis' works can be universally understood, and the definition of the chair can be easily translated into any language, Zhigalov's work requires the knowledge of the Russian language and close familiarity with the Soviet context. Bulatov's work can be translated into English without any problem—"Glory to the CPSU"— but it is hard to translate the isolation and lack of freedom experience of living in Soviet society to someone who has never lived in a country under a totalitarian regime.

## INTERMEDIALITY AND HUMOR

Western and MANI artists worked with humorous ways of integrating visual and linguistic elements into paintings and performances. The work *Blah, Blah, Blah*, created in 2015 by an American artist Mel

Bochner, exemplifies a humorous use of language in Western Conceptual art. *Blah, Blah, Blah* is a multi-colored painting that presents the word "blah" written horizontally four times on the canvas. When asked about the use of humor in his painting, Bochner stated that, "For me, humor is, first of all, a skeptical way of looking at the world.... From this point of view, the goal of humor is the subversion of certainty."[10] By reducing his language to colloquial, simple and childish words and sounds, Bochner removed the level of seriousness typical of high art forms. The word "blah" does not mean anything, and by repeatedly listing it across the canvas, he is communicating the concept of nothingness both linguistically and visually. By simplifying the language and annulling the canvas by reducing it to nothingness, Bochner suggests the viewer annul or critically reconsider one's expectations of art.

In the action *Opisannyi Krug or Inscribed/Urinated on Circle* (fig. 3), Zhigalov also turned a childish joke, in this case about urination, into an artwork. Investigation of the Circle series in folio 4 contains a photograph of the action *Opisannyi Krug* performed by Zhigalov. This



Fig. 3. Anatolii Zhigalov, *Opisannyi Krug (Inscribed/Urinated on Circle),* Folio 4, 1982, Original item located at the Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, M.A.N.I. Collection FSO 01-066.

photograph depicts the figure of a man (Zhigalov) with his back to the photographer who is standing on the snow and is presumably urinating. The word "opisannyi" is a pun signifying both "inscribed" and "urinated on". Both Bochner and Zhigalov were interested in humorous use of language and in applying low colloquial phrases, which are often considered inappropriate for high art forms.

An interesting similarity in the way these artists applied humor is in their reliance on certain linguistic, social, and political contexts. Similar to Zhigalov's auditory trick in the work *Kru-u-u-gom!*, in the action *Opisannyi Krug*, the pun gets completely buried for non-Russian speakers. When the title is translated, English speakers see two translated versions - "inscribed" and "urinated on" - but they do not have the privilege of seeing both meanings being captured in the word "opisannyi" at the same time.

## INTERMEDIALITY AND ARTIFICE

Western and MANI artists accentuated the artifice in their art works when combining visual, literary and linguistic mediums and formats. Cubists established the flatness of the canvas with their collaged newspaper and advertisement clippings that are glued together with imagery. In his papier collés S*till Life with Chair Canning* created in 1912, and *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper* created in 1913, Picasso wanted to establish canvas flatness in order to communicate to the viewers that these paintings are only representations of reality, but not reality itself. Clement Greenberg states that modern painting "had to spell out, rather than pretend to deny, the physical fact that it was flat".[11]

Bulatov's paintings combining words and imagery also assert the flatness of the canvas. The sky is portrayed very realistically in *Slava KPSS* following all the conventions of perspective and the illusion of depth. By overlaying a political slogan over the sky,[12] Bulatov removed the effect of realism and accentuated the artificiality of this painting. Realistic background imagery functions as a window to a different reality, inviting viewers to merge into it while the letters confront viewers by blocking their ability to enter the space of the painting. Both Picasso and Bulatov used text to accentuate canvas flatness and to establish the artificiality of their artworks. While Picasso attempted to integrate his

textual elements into the still life making them part of the newspaper, Bulatov did not bother to explain why words are hanging in the air in his painting. He did not assign these words to any physical object and the visual juxtaposition between the landscape and the text is intentional.

## DESACRALIZATION

Both modern and contemporary artists of the West and Moscow conceptualists experimented with ideas of desacralization by attacking traditional artistic ideas and forms and questioning the sacredness of famous artworks. They challenged artistic conventions and traditions by using humor, referencing to aspects of everyday life and political and social contexts, as well as mixing high and low forms of art.

### DESACRALIZATION AND HUMOR

Layers of irony are common for artworks that belong to the Surrealist, Dada and Western Conceptualist tradition. Michael Kelly suggested that "Dada must be considered as a turning point in the history of humor in art in the way that it moved nonsense, absurdity, and scatological issues to the forefront in its publications and performances."[13] Marcel Duchamp in his work *L.H.O.O.Q*, created in 1919, took a comical moustache and goatee and an offensive French expression - "L.H.O.O.Q" - which French school boys of the early twentieth century wrote on school walls - and placed them onto what is commonly considered to be an iconic and sacred art piece – Mona Lisa by Leonardo DaVinci. "L.H.O.O.Q" is an abbreviation, which, when pronounced out loud in French, sounds like "She has a hot ass" ("Elle ha chaud au cul"). Duchamp directed his irony towards this iconic artwork attempting to lower the level of its sacredness. Duchamp said once in an interview, "Humor is very important in my life, as you know. That's the only reason for living, in fact".[14]

Zhigalov's humorous attitude revealed in the action of *Opisannyi Krug* reflects his ironic attitude toward Malevich's tradition of putting geometric shapes "on the pedestal of perfection".[15] Abalakova and Zhigalov's work *Navoznyi Kvadrat* or *Dung Square* (fig.4) from the Investigation of the Square series (Folio 4) is the epiphany of the demystification and desacralization of the square in Moscow Conceptual art. *Dung Square*

Fig. 4. Natal'ia Abalakova and Anatolii Zhigalov, *Dung Square*, Folio 4, 1982, Original item located at the Archive of the Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, M.A.N.I. Collection FSO 01-066.

is a square shaped object made out of horse's excrement. *Dung Square* references *Black Square*— which was once perceived as a new visual and artistic icon of the twentieth century— now as an object made out of horse's excrement. Duchamp and Zhigalov attempted to demystify and desacralize sacred concepts, figures and objects.

### DESACRALIZATION AND ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Employing principles of desacralization by referring to aspects of everyday life is common for both Western and MANI artists. With his invention of the ready-made, Duchamp broke all artistic conventions. He praised randomness, absence of artistic choice, de-centering of authorship, and de-skilling— all the aspects that were deeply foreign for traditional art, such as painting and sculpture, and that became popular among modern artists. A shocking and novel aspect about Duchamp's *Bottle Rack*, created in 1914, is that he did not create this object but simply found it at a department store. He proclaimed this bottle rack to be an artwork by simply selecting it. By calling an everyday object an

artwork, Duchamp raised questions such as "What can be called art?" and "Who can be called an artist?"

In *Paintings Series* from folio 4, Kabakov attempted to recreate a Soviet communal kitchen space. *Paintings Series* in folio 4 presents photographs of paintings of boards and each board presents one everyday kitchen or household object surrounded by two conversation phrases – one on the top left and the other on the top right. One of the boards presents a mug in the centre with the phrase on the top left being "Whose mug is this?" and the phrase on the top right being "I do not know". Kabakov presented this board as a kind of miniature of a communal kitchen space. The space between the phrases on the board is representative of the space between the people in the kitchen who would be saying these words to each other. The topic of this dialogue is characteristic of the everyday casual nature of a conversation in a communal kitchen. At the same time the rigid placement of objects and phrases on this board speaks to how highly regulated and restricted these Soviet communal kitchens were. Kabakov commented on his work by stating, "I do not plan for any installation to be smooth and naturalistic; rather, it is meant to be an entry into repressive, communal zones."[16] Kabakov highlighted the level of formality present in the relationship between people in these communal spaces by having all the conversation between neighbors evolve around discussion of kitchen appliances and kitchen space.

Duchamp and Kabakov were interested in everyday actions, habits or objects, but in different ways. While Duchamp appropriated everyday objects, Kabakov recreated habitual experiences— urination in one case and communal living in the other. They also used different art forms and mediums. Duchamp presented a ready-made— something that can be described as a novel form of sculpture while Kabakov mixed painting and installation.

## DESACRALIZATION AND MIXING HIGH AND LOW FORMS OF ART

Western and MANI artists desacralized high art by combining it with low art forms and design elements. Lichtenstein and Warhol attacked traditional artistic conventions and perspectives and broadened the boundaries of what can be called art and what can be exhibited in museums. Pop art was born in response to individualized American Expressionism

movement known for its painterly techniques. Morgan suggested that pop art "adopted banal, ready-made forms from the urban environment as subject matter" and became famous for " its negation of personal expression, lack of regard for originality, and embrace of vulgarity".[17]

Bulatov's painting *Slava KPSS* also critically reconsiders more traditional forms of art by mixing low and high art forms. *Slava KPSS* is an example of a Sots-art (deriving from the Russian for Socialist Realism; *Sotsialisticheskiy* realism) work, which is "A type of Unofficial Art practised in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s in which the officially sanctioned style of Socialist Realism was undermined by treating its conventions in an ironic or mocking way".[18] *Slava KPSS* takes Soviet mass cultural conventions, in this case a famous political phrase, inserts it into a visual form and presents it as an art piece. Bulatov's artworks are very democratic as they rely on popular cultural references, such as "Slava KPSS", that any person from any social class of Soviet life at that time would know. While Bulatov used popular cultural phrases and famous political slogans, Warhol primarily worked with images of celebrities and brands. Unlike Warhol who cherished what he depicted in his paintings – pop culture, celebrity culture, and mass market, Bulatov was critical of the subject matter in his paintings. Bulatov "uses the devices of Socialist Realist propaganda to attack it".[19]

### COLLABORATION AMONG ARTISTS

Collaboration among artists was very prominent in the twentieth century both in the West art and in Moscow Conceptualism. In her essay "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art", Maria Lind states that, "Collaboration is without a doubt a central method in contemporary art […] which helped shape conceptual art in the 1960s and which was arguably crucial in the transition from modernism to postmodernism".[20] Andy Warhol tried many different ways of collaborating with other artists. He worked with his assistants in his studio, which he called a Factory. Warhol's collaboration with his assistants is representative of the twentieth-century artistic idea of de-skilling and de-centering of authorship, as well as fascination with impersonality, mass production[21] and consumer culture of the 1960s. Warhol also collaborated with other famous artists on his artworks.

Jean-Michel Basquiat was his most well-known collaborator. Works, such as *Amoco*, created in 1984, and *Bananas*, created in 1985, combined "Basquiat's hand-made, graffiti gesture vs. Warhol's mechanical methods and ready-made iconography" wherein "Basquiat's youth, energy and improvisational approach to painting paired with Warhol's slick and stylized production methods, synthesize unexpectedly into a brilliant visual dialogue".[22]

Zhigalov created most works in the Investigation of the Circle series in collaboration with other artists of different age and experience. Describing his *Vicious Circle* performance, Zhigalov listed how many artists had been involved in the performance. This list includes a variety of artists ranging from older established ones, such as Monastyrskii, to younger less experienced ones, such as Kizevalter and Mironenko. The collaborative nature of this series reflects the editorial choices of folio 4 editors and the general Moscow Conceptualist trend towards collaboration and teamwork.[23] The presence of large groups in folio 4 significantly increased the total number of artists in comparison to the previous folios. Folio 4 includes only 30 envelopes, but a total of 50 artists. Folio 4, unlike folio 1 edited by Monastyrskii who only included works of established artists, opened up doors to young and less established artists outside the Moscow Conceptualist circle. Folio 4 became a platform where young artists could be exhibited. The Moscow Conceptualists' interest in expanding the variety of artists resulted from stagnation, lack of creativity, as well as new faces in the circle, and immigration of many artists.

## CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that Moscow Conceptual art is concerned with the same approaches, artistic views, agendas, and techniques as Western art movements of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The most prominent characteristics of the movements under analysis are intermediality, desacralization, and collaboration among artists. Despite Moscow Conceptualists' geographic and linguistic isolation, they had similar interests to those of Western modern and contemporary artists. Moscow Conceptualism is in fact not as different, isolated, or provincial as it is often thought of in Western artistic circles.

## ENDNOTES

1.  I began my research on Moscow Conceptual art in 2018 when I won the Northrop Frye Centre Undergraduate Research Award. I assisted Professor Komaromi with preparing MANI (Moscow Archive of New Art) folios for digital publication on her site "Project for the Study of Dissidence and Samizdat" (University of Toronto Libraries). MANI folios, which were compiled in 1980-1982, contain photographs of Moscow Conceptual artworks.

2.  Yelena Kalinsky, "The View from Out Here: Western Conceptual Art in the Moscow Conceptualist Imagination," Athanor 29 (2011): 99. In this essay, Kalinsky refers to one of the most famous Moscow Conceptual artists Ilia Kabakov. Kabakov sees Soviet Conceptual art as provincial, comparing the relationship between Western and Soviet art to that of Nozdrev and Pliushkin from Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*.

3.  By mentioning Russian art prior to Stalin's regime, I am referring to the Russian avant-garde movement in the forms of suprematism and constructivism as exemplified by Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky. Stalin banned the avant-garde exemplified by Kazimir Malevich in the 1930s and, therefore, during Stalin's regime there was a decline in artistic experimentation in visual art. Art became part of the political propaganda machine, rather than a platform for creation of new forms and ideas. I believe that Moscow Conceptual Art is the movement that reformed Russian art after many years of Sots Art. Moscow Conceptualists returned to the point in the Russian art of the early twentieth century, reworking and even challenging the ideas of Malevich and other avant-garde artists.

4.  MANI – (rus) Moskovskii Arkhiv Novogo Iskusstva. MANA – (eng) Moscow Archive of New Art. In this essay, I will use the original Russian abbreviation – MANI. I have had a chance to closely examine MANI works when assisting with the publication of MANI folios on the Samizdat platform on the University of Toronto website. I believe that MANI folios, as platforms that captured the most significant Moscow Conceptualist works, are illustrative of the Moscow Conceptual art movement.

5.  Yelena Kalinsky, "The MANI Archive," *Zimmerli Journal* 5 (2008): 121.

6.  Kalinsky, "The MANI Archive," 121.

7.  Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (New York and London: Phaidon, 2002), 116.

8.  Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002): [135-38].

9.  Erik Bulatov, "Живу Дальше : [Статьи, Интервью]," Артист. Режиссер. Театр (2009): 69.

10. Christopher Snow Hopkins, " Drivel, Drool, Babble, Blabber: An Evening with Mel Bochner," created in 2016 at Hypperallergic, https://hyperallergic.com/332613/drivel-drool-babble-blabber-an-evening-with-mel-bochner/

11. Clement Greenberg, "Collage," in *Arts and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 71.

12. Ian Chilvers and John Glaves-Smith, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (Oxford University Press, 2015) https://www-oxfordreference-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191792229.001.0001/acref-9780191792229-e-

424?rskey=rXoYQn&result=1.

13. Michael Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2014) 2nd ed. https://www-oxfordreference com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ view/10.1093/acref/9780199747108.001.0001/acref-9780199747108-e-381?rskey=PaAls1&result=4

14. Jeanne Siegel, "Some Late Thoughts of Marcel Duchamp, from an Interview with Jeanne Siegel", *Arts Magazine*, 43 (December 1968-January 1969): 21-22.

15. Irina Karasik, "The Adventures of the "Black Square," *TOTART* (2011): 225.

16. Ilya Kabakov, Margarita Tupitsyn, and Victor Tupitsyn, "About Installation," *Art Journal* 58 (1999): 69.

17. Ann Lee Morgan, The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists (2007)

18. Ian Chilvers, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (2015)

19. Ian Chilvers, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (2015)

20. Maria Lind, "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," *Public: New Communities*: 53.

21. "Who's Who in the Twentieth Century," Oxford University Press (2003).

22. "ANDY WARHOL, JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT AND COLLABORATION PAINTING," Van de Weghe (2008).

23. Aleksandra Danilova and Elena Kuprina-Liakhovich, "Papki MANI: Opyt Modelirovaniya Kul'turnogo Prostranstva. Pristupaya k Issledovaniyu." Gosudarstvennyy Institut Iskusstvoznaniya: [256-257].

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# Embracing Impermanence: On Art Conservation and Contemporary Art

 "Look with your eyes, not your hands": a familiar foreboding phrase spoken to us as we wandered through art galleries and museums as children. The work was priceless, we were told, and contact with the oil on our fingertips would contribute to its degradation over time. But the efforts to preserve an artwork in a gallery or museum extend far beyond our parents' cautionary tones and the "DO NOT TOUCH" signs scattered throughout. Behind the scenes a great deal of time, energy, and CO2 goes into the preservation of an artwork: climate control, lighting, and renovations are key in the preservation of art, all at the expense of a large carbon footprint. With this in mind, we find that institutions that aim to be at the forefront of social change are in many ways complicit in one of the most pressing challenges of our time, the growing consequences of climate change, and now more than ever these institutions are reaching a moment of crucial reflection upon these practices.

        In the contemporary moment, we are witnessing an increasing affinity towards the temporary, the situational, and the active role of the spectator.    There is a growing dedication to the impermanent which, while breed of conglomerate motivations, in part has been brought about through strengthening commitment to ecological and social urgency. Further, this development in recent decades which prioritizes the ephemeral, works to dismantle preconceived notions of 'art as artifact' in need of careful maintenance. This essay will examine the ecological motives behind this advancing interest and explore the realization of contemporary curators and conservators that unsustainable preservation methods may, in fact, contribute to the deterioration of the art they seek to protect.  I argue that, as a result, curators and artists alike are showing

enthusiasm for allowing works to have autonomous life spans, and investing in alternative exhibition methods; and ultimately that our investment in art conservation needs to be slowed, and future thought surrounding current and alternative art conservation methods must better reflect the values of the moment.

In both private and public art, we are seeing a growing investment in works that are temporally finite, changing, or developing. Organizations like Situations in the UK or Art Angel, as examples, are pursuing works that rely heavily on constructed experience. This trend has been gaining momentum since the 50s and 60s when performance, site specificity, and land art were popularized, and groups like Fluxus were creating temporary works outside of the gallery without financial incentive.[1] Frustrations with the artificial, bureaucratic, and exclusionary connotations of the gallery space drove artists to attempt integrate their work into outside environments. As Miwon Kwon writes in *One Place After Another*,

> The modern gallery/museum space, […] with its stark white walls, artificial lighting […] controlled climate, and pristine architectonics, was perceived […] as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function. [The] features of a gallery/museum, […] were deemed to be coded mechanisms that *actively* disassociate the space of art from the outer world.[2]

She further writes, that "whether interruptive or assimilative, [the work] gave itself up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it."[3] As artists pushed back against the traditional space of the white cube, a resulting dedication to external environments and the local ecologies of place surfaced. As Kwon suggests, site-specific artwork, intentionally or unintentionally, became specifically about engaging with its surrounding environment.

Today, in the wake of a climate crisis, this underlying exhaustion with artificial object-based intervention is all the more prevalent. Artists and spectators alike are growing increasingly restless with the layer upon layer of permanent construction in both the external landscape and gallery space. In response to this, artists have been turning not only to site specific, but to the temporal, time-based media, and to situational

aesthetics. As Andrea Baldini has written on the subject of Public-Art Publics,

> the awareness of [temporary works] imminent 'fate' encourages artists involved in temporary projects […] to address important and (perhaps) difficult issues that characterize the current lives of those selected as members of their respective public-art publics. In this sense, the temporariness of this kind of projects facilitates [sic] more specific strategies of public engagement.[4]

This extends to account for the potential for temporary projects to engage with the physical and environmental aspects of their public. Prioritizing the temporary over permanent art objects allows for experiential invention, without becoming yet another human impediment of the landscape. Ephemeral works are interruptions of, not obstructions to, their local environment and are less inclined to hinder the development of those environments. They are largely impacted by, or dependent, on the surrounding atmosphere and through this, converse harmoniously with their surroundings rather than existing forcefully within them. As Baldini argues, fleeting public works challenge us to look at the current moment, and act as means of escape from the glorification of the art object as an artifact of culture or urban redesign.

In 2019, the first Toronto Biennial was held. Focused along the city waterfront, the Biennial committed itself to the "Waterfront Dilemma" and did not shy away from the situational in instigating this conversation. The Biennials' *Night Walk with Lost Rivers and Rivers Rising*, took viewers on a walk through the city that was accompanied by poetry readings and discussion. This performance piece invited viewers to retrace Garrison Creek that was covered over during industrialization, and encouraged the audience to engage with what remain of that previous landscape. Walk goers were then invited to excavate part of a now paved over 19th century bridge that once crossed the creek, pack the collected soil into bags, and contribute them to an installation work by Maria Thereza Alves featured in the Biennial's main exhibition space. In this case, the work existed both in the gallery as an installation piece— photographic and sculptural—and outside of the gallery where viewer participation was intrinsic. Through this combination this work achieved

what its lasting gallery component alone could not; grounding itself in the present through critical examination of the past and progressive discussion of future development, while focusing on what is here, what is now, what we can do to move forward.

With increasing interest in art as conveyed through experience, through temporary intervention, or limited durational occurrences, the preservation of physical art manifestations becomes more difficult. As Lou Zona, a director at Butler Institute of American Art has stated, "Most modern art is born, it lives, and it passes on […] Museums try to keep artwork alive."[5] With greater frequency museums are having to devise solutions to preserve artworks whose ends are of comparable importance to their durational existence. In thinking through the practice of conservation, however, we have to examine the possibility that art making and preservation have become in some ways antithetical to one another. If a vital aspect of a work, explicit or implicit, is to allow it to end, do methods of preservation become more an act of aggression than care? Is it then, perhaps, a convenient time to ask whether the practice of actively conserving art works may be increasingly out of line with some contemporary art values? And how would a profound shift away from current conservation practices locate itself in the greater cannon of art history?

As Sarah Brophy and Elizabeth Wylie put it in their influential handbook, *The Green Museum*, care and preservation of collections is highly extractive of energy and resource and is "inextricably connected to the health of the global environment."[6] This is something conservators are becoming more conscious of with regard to their current practice. As Megan de Silva and Jane Henderson wrote on the subject, "conservators have begun to question whether [their] short-term actions to preserve heritage may contribute to its future destruction through climate change."[7] With these sentiments in mind, the environmental impact of preservation methods directly counteract what a great deal of art works today seek to convey. This is a crucial note in understanding how these methods' acting upon the work becomes *part* of the work. Where the works may seek to provoke thought surrounding sustainability and environmental engagement, institutions that seek to 'serve and protect' these works counteract their intended function.

This is not to say that there are not measures that can productively replace current practices. As Brophy and Wylie outlines extensively, adopting the LEED program, which evaluates and awards museums points based on six categorizes pertaining to the sustainability of their establishment, is one of the most effective and recognized methods for a museum to go green.[8] Replacing air conditioning and heating systems with HVAC systems will improve energy efficiency,[9] switching lighting systems to LED can cut down immensely on an institution's costs and energy consumption, and storing items of similar material together in specifically allocated rooms (i.e. ceramics with other ceramics, glass with glass, metal with metal) can minimize need for climate control.[10] Still, a crucial component in rethinking our current practices is to rethink the motivation behind them, what that motivation is in response to, and what it counteracts.

In recent decades, we have seen the role of the curator become increasingly integral in art endeavours.[11] Nadim Samman's *Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition* featured 30+ contributions by artists to be buried in a capsule on Isla del Coco and never viewed by anyone outside of those organizing the exhibition. This project shows that curators, too, are becoming more aware of the conflicting narratives at play, and, like artists, are growing less concerned with traditional display. According to Sammam, *Treasure of Lima* "interrogate[s] models of spectatorship and property rights, while venturing the question 'How can an exhibition create its own legend?'"[12] This exhibition was designed never to be uncovered, with the location kept secret, and the proceeds from the sale of this work— which was sold in the form of encrypted coordinates for which the collector was not given the key—were used to open a shark conservation centre off the shore of the island. Here we see a disregard for the preservation of the exhibition itself. Left to the elements, hidden and buried, never to be touched again, the fate of the object is unknown to anyone. Instead, the interest is in the exhibition's influence and ability to engage with the island's past and present local ecologies, and, in turn, to become an environmental venture.

The project further demonstrates that collectors have a growing interest in alternative means of acquiring art works that have less to do with immediate access to the work itself, and more to do with an investment

in the life of the work, preserved through intellectual responsiveness to its intended purpose. As W. J. T Mitchell wrote, referencing Jean Tinguely's self-destroying sculpture, *Homage to New York*, "postmodern art tries, among other things, to be difficult to own or collect, existing only as ruined fragments or photographic 'documentation'."[13]   Not only are aesthetics and art historical concerns now secondary to concerns surrounding engagement with social urgency as Kwon has identified,[14] but in many cases, interest in the visible display is even falling behind interest in art works as mechanisms of adjustment of human engagement with resource, geography or climate.   Museums and galleries of the current day are having to confront this, as their role no longer exclusively involves repairs or preservation acts towards art; "We're dealing with abstract concepts around reproduction. We're moving from physical treatment to stakeholder theory."[15]

 The museum space has long claimed to be a representative of social progress and has often been tied to revolution.  When, the royal Louvre Palace transitioned into a museum for the people at the pinnacle of the French revolution,[16] it became, according to Carol Duncan, "a lucid symbol of the fall of the Old Regime and the rise of a new order."[17] The art institution is political and indicative of social change; however, as Hans Haacke's infamous cancelled 1971 Guggenheim exhibit and Andrea Fraser's numerous institutional critiques, indicate, a struggle between artist and museum/gallery space unfolded during the modernist period as artists questioned and challenged whether art institutions upheld that legacy. Today, with many of these same skepticisms still ripe, there is need for museum/gallery/art intuitions to rethink many of their current practices from the ground up. To echo what Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez has argued extensively, there is need for institutions of today to slow themselves,[18] to compensate for their immense and strenuous net output in the social and environmental sphere.

 Slowing investment in established practices requires a strong dialogue between conservation and contemporary art theory. Space has to be made for in-depth consideration of questions of the temporal span of particular works and for identifying how the ways that we collect and maintain artwork may influence particular dimensions of the work. We are at a crucial moment in which galleries and museums are actively

reconsidering their practices and their impact on the global climate. Numerous encouraging initiatives have been and are being undertaken to improve the sustainability of art institutions, and far more solutions have been made available than have been outlined in this paper. Still, much can be gained by incorporating into this conversation what many artists and curators today seek to pursue by keeping in mind the possible ecological and environmental motivations in their work. By embracing the opportunity for impermanence, and carrying out a critical investigation into what it is the artwork 'wants' and by recognizing that the way that a work is maintained and preserved, integrates itself to become, in one way or another, part of the work and in doing so may have lasting impact on the works function. —this final sentence needs to be worked on and broken down into two parts as it is too long, also if you could make sure your bib and foot notes are good as I had to reformat them.

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# Reconciling Fashion and Ecology: Applying 'Green Materialism' to the Fashion System

With the formation of the Western haute couture industry in the 19th century, designers released new styles biannually in Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer collections. Following the 20th century boom of ready-to-wear production, we find ourselves in a world where contemporary fast-fashion brands have increased 'seasons' by fifteen times,[1] mutating the cycles of manufacture and consumption that initially echoed natural rhythms. This unprecedented growth places the fashion industry among top polluters, with its greenhouse gas emissions surpassing all international air travel and overseas shipping, combined.[2] In addition to the drastic output of goods, millions of tonnes of discarded clothing accumulate in landfills, or are incinerated each year.[3] Reconciling fashion and ecology does not only demand a more sustainable supply chain, but also necessitates a re-evaluation of paradigms that constitute the current fashion system. These paradigms include the exploitation of natural material "with apparent impunity,"[4] as well as an accelerated timeframe for the production of new merchandise. In an industry whose current ethos and business model are predicated on ephemerality, fashion appears to be at odds with nature and sustainability.

Eco art plays a vital role in rethinking fashion because it lies outside of this system, where artists are not bound by convention or commercial interests; yet, artistic responses to this environmental crisis are scarce. The objective of eco art – be it activism, inspiring heuristic discovery or sweeping reforms – can be achieved both by traditional art media as well as eco-conscious fashion design.[5] In relation to fashion, eco art and conscious fashion design often confront the two main paradigms related to time and materiality discussed above. Sustainable couture and

Fig. 1. Nicole Dextras, *Weedrobes, Lady Calla*, 2012.  Image: nicoledextras.com

quotidian dress are not simply 'good for the environment' – they also raise social awareness and link the human body to nature in a powerful way. Stacy Alaimo discusses the implications of connecting human corporeality to ecology in her *Bodily Natures*:

> Potent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature. Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.' It makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background…for the exploits of the human, since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin – perhaps even closer.[6]

The potential impact of eco fashion can be understood within this theoretical framework, as garments can be considered mediators between the human body and the external environment. Since clothing is intimately connected to the human body and non-human nature, it has the capacity to shift our dialectical understanding of both. This is related to what Jane Bennet refers to as "green materialism," which is a holistic view of humans and non-human material that challenges

the human/nature dichotomy of the Western worldview.[7]   Considering conventional eco art alongside fashion, this paper argues that fashion and ecology are compatible when materiality, waste, or time are used to reframe our relationship to nature.

This past April, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London presented an exhibit entitled, *Fashioned from Nature*. The exhibition promoted the "simple but profound truth that fashion is made from nature… [it] provides the source for each garment that we choose to wear as our second skin."[8]   Although this statement may seem obvious, it is worth contemplating. Clothing, like food, has become far-removed from the natural world in our collective imagination; often, plants, animal fibers, and petrochemicals are transformed through processing and sartorial practice to the point where a garment's origins are undetectable. Since clothing is seen as a separate entity from the environment, demystifying the source and manufacture of textiles is crucial in bridging this imagined divide. Nicole Dextras is a Canadian artist whose work is concerned with reconnecting the dressed body to the landscape as well as interrogating consumerism in the fashion industry.[9]   Her *Weedrobes* project makes the connection between fashion and the natural world immediate (see Figures



Fig. 2. Nicole Dextras, *Weedrobes, Laurel Sufragette*, 2011. Image: nicoledextras.com

Fig. 3. Nicole Dextras, *Weedrobes, Maple Flapper Jumper*, 2011. Image: nicoledextras.com

1, 2, and 3). These vibrant garments are comprised of assemblages of leaves and flowers that the artist forages or picks from her garden in Vancouver.[10]    Dextras considers "the ephemeral qualities of [her pieces]" as being representative of "the vulnerability and fragility of our ecosystem."[11]    These biodegradable dresses are based on emblematic silhouettes from Western fashion history, especially from the late 19th and early 20th century, which coincides with the industrialization of clothing manufacture. Dextras' choice to use outdated styles that were emblematic symbols of modernity (for example, the Flapper) call attention to how desirable aesthetics quickly become passé. This exposes the irony at the heart of *Weedrobes*, which is that the pieces are just as transitory as fashion itself; however, her designs are easily subsumed back into the environment, unlike synthetic textiles that will never fully decompose. Furthermore, the dresses are involved in performances where models question the public about their knowledge of sustainable clothing in urban spaces, usually commercial shopping centers.[12] The *Weedrobes* performance creates a dialogue that implicates members of the public who might not otherwise consider these pressing issues. Dextras makes apparent the connection between humans and the
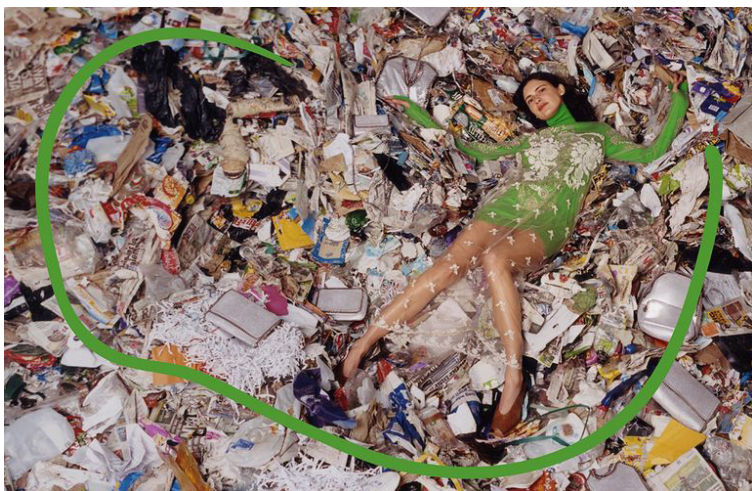
Fig. 4. Stella McCartney, Fall/Winter 2017 campaign shot at a Scottish landfill.
Image: Harper's Bazaar, www.harpersbazaar.com

natural origins of fashion, and further, educates her audience about its impact on the planet.

Of equal conceptual importance is the consideration of waste and re-useable material. For example, luxury fashion designer, Stella McCartney, confronted her audience with waste through her Fall/Winter 2017 advertising campaign. McCartney is outspoken about climate change and is a designer who implements what she advocates: her garments are made of sustainable materials and her company is adamant about ethical labour practices. McCartney's Fall/Winter collection in 2017 was contentious because of the location of the shoot – models were photographed amongst derelict cars and putrid garbage at a landfill in Scotland in order to expose the realities of "disposable consumer culture."[13] The model pictured below (Figure 4) reclines and rests her head on piles of trash, while a lime green, haphazardly drawn circle insinuates some form of cycle, perhaps signaling the source and final resting place of our garments. Knowing that this setting was not feigned, the image evokes a jarring sensorial response; the viewer and consumer is faced with the unpleasant consequences of our actions. Ultimately, one must keep in mind that this campaign was created in

service of selling merchandise, however, this does not detract from the power of the images or McCartney's message, especially because of her commitment to sustainability. McCartney's practice is representative of how commercial fashion can be compatible with ecology, not only in its material, but also in principle.

Furthermore, an artist who is concerned with waste and the re-use of natural material is Jalila Essaïdi. The Dutch biotech artist engineered a textile and designed a fashion collection that are "about overriding our natural aversion to waste."[14] A scientific breakthrough allowed Essaïdi to transform cow manure into bioplastic that can be spun and woven into a smooth, lustrous fabric (Figures 5 and 6). This material, called Mestic®, offers a practical solution to the surplus of manure from the agricultural sector and would divert harmful amounts of nitrogen and phosphate from water and soil.[15] Again, not only is this material 'good for the environment', but the focus on materiality, especially when it is transformed excrement, has wider cultural implications. Where McCartney was confronting the aversion to waste in terms of bringing it to light, Essaïdi's work challenges us to embrace all aspects of biotic life. Jane Bennet postulates in Vibrant Matter that a holistic view of nature and humans necessarily involves acknowledging that trash, bodily waste and other nonhuman elements are "actants more than objects."[16] This means that in order to challenge anthropocentrism, we have to admit that "nonhumanity infects culture."[17] Even though it is used to clothe people, Essaïdi's enterprise puts waste at the forefront; in its materiality, Mestic® is an effective way to question the valuation of

Fig.s 5 and 6.  Jalila Essaïdi, *Mestic®*. Images: www.inspidere.com

Fig. 7. Still taken from Dilys Williams et al., *Acquire* for the V&A's Fashioned from Nature exhibit, 2018, www.sustainable-fashion.com

certain natural materials over others.

Lastly, *Acquire* is a video installation that problematizes unsustainable material by deconstructing an activity that is swift and mindless – the printing of a receipt after a purchase. Created by graduate students at the University of the Arts, London, for the V&A's *Fashioned from Nature* exhibit, the complete installation entitled *Fashion Now* includes five shorts that represent each stage in the lifecycle of a garment: design, make, acquire, wear/care, and discard. *Acquire* is particularly commanding because it is straightforward – it attempts to show the "real cost" of the clothing we purchase.[18] The video consists of a silent, continuous shot of two sales tickets being slowly printed, one directly after the other. The first receipt begins with the word 'squander' outlined in bright red, and proceeds to itemize the ecological effects of standard viscose. This includes the amounts of carbon emitted and water used per kilogram of material, as well as its contribution to deforestation and the subsequent impact on non-human animals (Figures 7-8). This

information is synthesized into the standard format of a ledger, but the final amount is represented as "TOTAL: DESTRUCTION." Following this, a receipt entitled 'cherish' emerges and carries out the same analysis, but for Tencel™, a biodegradable and sustainable form of rayon, which incurs significantly less damage (Figures 10 and 11). Tencel™ is by no means framed as a miracle product or the perfect solution to these issues, but it makes clear the impact of choosing sustainable material over an alternative. The presentation of this information is incredibly effective: large numbers are broken down into more conceivable amounts, and this data is coupled with text, such as "Your planet will be debited the above amount. Damage is done – no returns."[19] This phrase in particular reveals our transactional view of nature, where the brief annoyance usually associated with a 'no returns' policy is mocked and states that our impact on the earth is irreparable. The majority of consumers do not consider the environmental impact of their clothing before, during, or after their ownership of a garment. By slowing down the process of obtainment, something routine and mindless becomes



Fig. 8. Still taken from Dilys Williams et al., *Acquire* for the V&A's Fashioned from Nature exhibit, 2018, www.sustainable-fashion.com

Figs. 9 and 10. Stills from Dilys Williams et al., *Acquire* for the V&A's *Fashioned from Nature* Exhibit, 2018, www.sustainable-fashion.com

worthy of contemplation. For instance, lengthening the duration of a purchase challenges the exaggerated time cycle of fashion:

> For mass-produced fast fashion the metaphor of speed serves as a smoke screen for the harsh realities of the sourcing of materials, means of production, conditions of workers, distances traveled for distribution, and other less than acceptable factors. A slow or more sustainable approach focuses greater attention on valuing and knowing the object, and demands design that generates significant experiences, which are not transformed into empty images for rapid consumption.[20]

By slowing down the processes involved in manic consumption, harsh environmental and social realities become apparent. *Acquire* implicates its audience and suggests a way forward – it is bequeathing part of the responsibility for sustainability on the consumer, but it also recognizes that widespread change needs to come from designers themselves.

In conclusion, this survey of artistic practice demonstrates that fashion and ecology are not merely compatible, but that clothing acts as a mediator between humanity and non-humanity. The work of Nicole Dextras and Jalila Essaïdi incites thoughtful considerations of the transformation of natural material, while Stella McCartney and the group of students at UAL prove that reframing our current view of nature can expose the adverse effects of the fashion industry while simultaneously shifting our relationship to consumerism. All of the works that were discussed pivoted around their physical materials or their project's

conception of materiality. In accordance with the theoretical work of Jane Bennet and Stacy Alaimo, this focus is necessary in order to shift our anthropocentric worldview: "If nature is to matter, we need more potent, more complex understandings of materiality."[21]

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## MORE ART HISTORY WITH US

The History of Art Students' Association (HASA) is a student-run organization based at the the University of Toronto, St. George campus. HASA strives to enhance the experiences of undergraduate students in Art History, and is dedicated to providing a stimulating and interesting forum for art-related subjects.

We hold seminars, speaker series and more!
Find out about upcoming events and opportunities:

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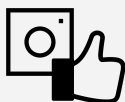
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