

Selva, Issue 3: The Classic

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Selva: A Journal of the History of Art, no. 3: The Classic

From the editor's introduction, by Jennifer Nelson:

This issue of Selva arose from two facts that do not combine with any satisfactory ethical result. First of all, when under threat, non-dominating communities have a lower probability of maintaining their classics on their own terms. To point this out is also a moderate, perhaps too-polite way of remembering that genocided or nearly-genocided communities in particular may have a zero or significantly decreased probability of maintaining classics without having their classics reframed (sometimes literally) to serve their killers' communities.

Second of all, art history still relies on the classic to proceed. This is something of a tautology: a community will work to preserve what it believes sets an eternal value; what is preserved continues to set that value; and so on until the things that survive—that are available to art history—are indeed those classics of a community's virtues. The various canons of art history can thus be understood as overlapping Venn diagrams of notionally virtuous circles produced largely by overlapping dominating communities. Many an intervention in art history has privileged one dominating community over another, or restored one dominating community's classic to its rightful place alongside the others. And all too often, art history's recourse to materiality, ecocriticism, and the study of trade networks, alongside a so-called ontological turn, has occurred at the expense of meaningful discussion of the values and standards that inhabit objects, sites, performances, and images within non-dominating communities. [...]

So here is the task I gave this issue of Selva: how can scholars uplift histories of non-imperial endurance in object, site, and image? How can one re-think what a classic is in ways that make an ethical art history more sustainable? I asked our seven authors to think about what kinds of objects, images, sites, and performances endure, and about what kinds should endure.

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TOC: Selva, Issue 3: The Classic. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 14, 2022 (accessed Jul 12, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/35679>>.