

Ruralities, Artistic Ecologies and Sustainable Futures

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In the article *Is the Countryside the Future of the Art World?* (2019), Tom Jeffreys explains the confluence of events that undoubtedly make 2019 a turning point in the art world's recognition of what has been termed 'new rurality' in the world of contemporary art. From the United States and Europe, with very different approaches to the museum institution, two initiatives converged in 2019 that marked a significant shift in how rurality began to be framed within contemporary art discourse. One of them, led by architect Reem Koolhaas, with a clear commitment to rural issues from an institutional perspective, and the other led by the Myvillages collective, which was not so much interested in defining rural issues as in using rural issues as a critique of cultural hegemony in the arts. Also in 2019, The Rural Assembly Symposium (Whitechapel, London) was held, at which artists, theorists, academics and curators contributed to articulating new perspectives on the countryside based on everyday experience and a critique of the rural-urban binary.

Thus, the panel *Networked Rural: Mapping the Translocal* sought to break with the representation of the rural as a remote space, isolated from global networks and economies. Rural environments are not static and disconnected from the dynamism of urban and global life, neither are they set apart from the complexities of industrial globalization (Peeren & Valdés-Olmos). Hence the need to foster a conversation that emphasises the interconnectedness of rural places, analysing how rural communities are integrated into a network of relationships that span the local, regional and global levels.

In recent years we have witnessed the consolidation of rural practices within translocal and transdisciplinary frameworks in various fields: new economies, pedagogies and rural residences combine community building, coexistence, social practice and concrete utopianism. In some of them, concepts such as 'post-study' and 'community art' play a central role, placed within the framework of collectives, artists' self-organised projects and alternative communities allocated outside of transnational cultural centres.

Rural areas are, in our time of multiple ecological, economic, and social crises, gaining renewed

attention as spaces of possibility, resistance, and imagination. In contrast to models that concentrate resources in cities, widening the rural-urban gap and subordinating the countryside to urban and industrial growth, new cultural geographies and ecological epistemologies are appearing as valuable propositions: ones that revalue rural knowledge and sustainable practices, within forms of human life that are deeply rooted in the materiality of their territories. These rural modalities present alternatives to both the hypercapitalist urban centres and to industrial agro-economies which include factory farming, monocrops and extractivism. Across many territories, especially in the Global South and in peripheral areas of the Global North, there is a genealogy of rural communities that have long developed ways of life based on care, self-management of resources, and cooperation. Far from being residual, these forms of organization are now being reimagined as viable alternatives for envisioning sustainable futures in both rural and urban contexts.

This Call For Papers stems from the plurality of these realities, to open a critical and transdisciplinary space for reflection on the growing role of ruralities in shaping resilient, diverse, and sustainable futures.

We have structured the core content of this REG|AC volume around three pivotal axes, illustrated by open questions derived from case studies involving art, social practice and visibility from the late 20th century through to the early 21st:

- Rural Imaginaries & Translocal Practices explores the symbolic construction of the rural through a translocal lens, examining how links are forged between geographically distant contexts that are nonetheless connected through artistic, cultural, or activist practices rooted in shared approaches to the rural as a site of critical action and creative potential.
- Art, Agroecologies & Institutional Critique investigates the intersections between contemporary artistic practices, agroecology, and strategies of institutional critique. The focus is on initiatives that operate in rural contexts to imagine new production models (both cultural and agricultural), rethinking the relationship between art, territory, and sustainability.
- Art & Rurality Between Centers and Peripheries addresses art and rurality projects in the tension between centers and peripheries. With a special emphasis on the Global South, we are interested in case studies that trace the geography of rurality within a complex multi-focal scenario.

Beyond these three axes, possible topics for this volume of REG|AC include, but are not limited to:

- What role do rural spaces play in contemporary ecological imaginaries and environmental activism?
- How do gender, migration, and labor reshape contemporary rural imaginaries?
- What forms of care, repair, and maintenance emerge from art practices rooted in rural ecologies?
- How do forms of knowledge and cultural practices shape social, economic and environmental dynamics within rural Indigenous communities?
- How are rural cultures being urbanized worldwide?
- How are agricultural practices, rural labor, and landscapes represented and negotiated within contemporary artistic and cultural practices?
- How does the rural artworld operate from an economic standpoint?
- In which ways does the artworld fetishize the rural as an idealized image?

Together, these pivotal axes offer a complex, multidimensional reading of realities—not only as

physical geographies but also as epistemic, symbolic, and political spaces. Through dialogue between researchers, artists, activists, and local agents, this conference seeks to share situated knowledge and foster collaborative networks that contribute to imagining more just, sustainable, and livable futures from rural contexts, within an understanding that goes beyond binaries and inhabits the urban-rural continuum.

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Fig. 1. Doris Salcedo (2007). Shibboleth. Tate Modern, London. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.

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WORK SCHEDULE

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