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Articles

Reflections of Imperialism: The Meta Sudans in Rome and the Provinces BRENDA LONGFELLOW
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Built by the emperors of the Flavian dynasty, the conical fountain known in antiquity as the Meta Sudans appears on imperial coins and medallions issued by the emperors Titus, Domitian, Alexander Severus, and Gordian III. The enduring imperial interest in the fountain can be attributed to the monument's topographic and ideological associations with Augustus and the legacy of imperial Rome, associations that inspired the building of similar fountains in North Africa as well as the use of conical fountains as numismatic symbols of Rome in the cities of Corinth in Achaea and Nikopolis in Epirus.

The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación de Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico ANGÉLICA J. AFANADOR-PUJOL
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When the Spanish viceroy Antonio de Mendoza first visited Michoacán, Mexico (about 1539), he commissioned a Franciscan friar to record the indigenous customs of the region. The friar, together with local native nobles and artists, produced the illustrated manuscript known as the "Relación de Michoacán." One of these indigenous artists transformed the European Tree of Jesse, a motif depicting Christ's genealogy, to represent the local indigenous noble family. Such an act of mimicry and appropriation allowed the artist to represent the native nobles as the rightful rulers of Michoacán and to communicate this conviction to the manuscript's colonial audience.

Raphael's Fire in the Borgo and the Italian Pictorial Vernacular PATRICIA L. REILLY
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Modern scholars have often judged Raphael's Fire in the Borgo to be a disappointment. It has been criticized for a lack of proportion, narrative, and structural coherence and for its awkward Michelangelesque nudes. However, rather than as a tired pastiche executed by assistants, it might better be understood as Raphael's argument for a new theory of painting derived from the literary texts being produced at the court of Pope Leo X.

Specifically, the Fire in the Borgo asks to be evaluated according to Pietro Bembo's new criterion for evaluating a work of literature: Petrarchan pleasantness (*piacevolezza*) over Dantean gravity (*gravità*).

Merciful Mother Kannon and Its Audiences CHELSEA FOXWELL
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In 1884, the Japanese painter Kano Hōgai exhibited an early version of his Merciful Mother Kan-

non (1888) in Paris. The fact of the painting's exhibition abroad provides a basis for reconsidering its long-debated iconographic and historical significance. Taken in the context of the Meiji period (1868–1912), it aspires to a legibility that transcends the particularities of iconography through what was assumed to be the universal truth of the human body. Symbolic devices and painterly references anticipate the requirements of different viewers, thus inviting multiple interpretations and provoking a tacit consensus among viewers of different political and cultural backgrounds.

Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration TOM FOLLAND
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The Combines that Robert Rauschenberg produced between 1953 and 1956 represent a "queering" of Abstract Expressionism and, by extension, the culture of postwar modernism itself, through the artist's pronounced use of decoration. The decorative materiality of his work is overlooked by current scholarship, which frames the Combines as either a postmodern allegory of representation or an iconographically read revelation of his gay identity. An alternative view is to refuse biography and draw on queer theory's opposition to legible—and legislated—identity to read the decorative as a queerly deconstructive strategy deployed to undermine postwar American art's grand narratives of subjectivity.

The State of Art History: Contemporary Art TERRY SMITH
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Contemporary art became prominent in public media, markets and museums, and art-world discourse during the 1990s, eclipsing most previous art. Since then, it has become a burgeoning art historical research field, yet its academic status remains ambiguous, its position in relation to art criticism is contradictory, and its goals and procedures are radically undertheorized.

Nonetheless, the concept of the contemporary offers as rich a resource for understanding art within contemporaneity as did the concept of the modern for art within modernity, as revealed by this survey of the concept's emergence, history, and current status in art historical discourse.

Reviews

Stephen Houston, Claudia Brittenham, Cassandra Mesick, Alexandre Tokovinine, and Christina Warinner, *Veiled Brightness: A History of Ancient Maya Color*

GABRIELA SIRACUSANO

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Horst Bredekamp, *Darwins Korallen: Frühe Evolutionsmodelle und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte*; Diana Donald and Jane Munro, eds., *Endless Forms: Charles Darwin, Natural Science, and the Visual Arts*, exh. cat.; Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer, eds., *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*; Julia Voss, *Darwin's Pictures: Views of Evolutionary Theory, 1837–1874*

RACHAEL Z. DELUE

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Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Relations between Painting and Sculpture in the Modern Age* ERIKA NAGINSKI

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Reviews Online

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Recent Books in the Arts

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Reference:

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<https://arthist.net/archive/597>.