Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art

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Contemporary Art and Political Ecology in East Asia

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Ecology is at the heart of contemporary politics. The Fukushima nuclear disaster, the smog in Beijing, and the "pristine" DMZ in the Korean peninsula force us to confront the ecological consequences of a globalized neoliberal system. Contemporary artists in East Asia have since long endeavored to raise environmental consciousness, stage ecological interventions, and experiment with new ways of life in nature. The purpose of this special issue is to document their work and develop theoretical insights that deepen our understanding of the relationship between art and political ecology.

Recently a set of new theoretical ideas - Thing Theory (Bill Brown), New Materialism (Jane Bennett), Posthumanism (Francis Fukuyama) and so on - have gained much traction in Europe and North America. They challenge the basic premise of complete human agency, which has been the philosophical foundation of the Anthropocene. We see two areas that need advancement in this theoretical upsurge. First, how could we connect these new formulations with classical ideas of nature in East Asia? Second, how should we not lose sight of political urgencies like decolonization and anti-neoliberalization while we dive deeper into the philosophical terrain of ecology? This special issue will serve as a first step in addressing these concerns. Thus we are particularly interested in creative projects and writings that pursue ecological justice together with social and political equality, because the search for vibrant ecologies is inherently linked to the search for radical democracies.

The theoretical and thematic explorations we seek include but are not limited to:

How do artists negotiate the post-colonial paradigm of equality and social justice alongside new investigations in ecology?
What is the renewed role of aesthetics in understanding politics of ecology, equality, and justice? How does art transform our understanding of ecology or the practice of eco-activism? Conversely, how does eco-political art transform our understanding of aesthetics? Do we see a new conceptualization of aesthetics based on collectivism and radical politics?
Is there a privileged aesthetic language with which we can discuss the politics of ecology, such as

new tactics of data accumulation and information visualization? How have the traditions of documentary realism and landscape painting figure into the aesthetics of eco-politics?
How do the examples of ecological art complicate the category of "contemporary Asian art" built heavily on art produced in urban centers?
How does the concept of ecology as a parameter and subject of artistic practice question the nation-bound categorization in contemporary art - and subsequently contribute to enriching, or overcoming, the "local/global" dyad?
How do artists simultaneously engage with the geopolitics of Cold War and the greenwashing "environmentalism" in areas such as the DMZ?
How was the notion of "nature" conceived and transformed in pre-modern and early modern periods? How does contemporary practice in East Asia - informed by classical discourse on nature - position itself in relation to Thing Theory/ New Materialism/ Posthumanism developed by Euro-American thinkers?

We welcome both shorter articles that describe and analyze specific artworks (1,500-3,000 words) and full-length papers that investigate theoretical issues and/or articulate important movements (6,000-8,000 words). The geographic region of "East Asia" includes Greater China (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan), North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. Essays with comparative perspectives will also be considered. Artworks can range in various mediums including painting, installation, photography, video, conceptual art, media art, documentary film, theatre and performance.

Please send us an abstract (250 to 500 words) and CV before 15 February, 2015. We will inform authors of our initial decisions by 1 March, 2015. Complete drafts will be due on 1 July, 2015 for review and revision.

Reference:
CFP: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 24, 2015 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/9328>.