The Journal of Art History and Museum Studies (JAHMS) is a student-edited, undergraduate peer-reviewed journal, launching in 2021 with its inaugural issue on the theme of “Art and Resilience.” Led by its student editorial board, JAHMS publishes issues online in the Fall and Spring academic terms and welcomes intercollegiate scholarly research of students across the globe.

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Dear Readers,

Around a year ago, we were approached by our department advisors, Dr. Alex Rich and Dr. Kristen Carter, about the idea of creating the first ever academic journal for undergraduate Art History and Museum Studies students. We would be lying to say we were not intimidated by the idea, but nonetheless knew it was an opportunity that could showcase voices for the first time in a growing field of study, and we were ecstatic to get to work!

When deciding on the theme for the first issue, “Art and Resilience” stood out as being particularly relevant. Social isolation, racial discrimination, political instability, and global disease are sadly timeless concerns and continue to leave mental and physical scars. With the disastrous Coronavirus pandemic still proving a threat here in the U.S. and persisting in other areas of the world, we found it important to remind readers of the profound perseverance of people across time, particularly as explored in the cultural spheres of art history and museums.

We circulated a call for papers and received a wide array of submissions from undergraduate students in many disciplines from around the U.S. and across the globe; all submissions offered unique insight into each writer’s area of expertise and point of view. After peer review by a panel of student colleagues and expert faculty, the submissions were narrowed to the seven articles that comprise this inaugural issue of JAHMS.

Befitting our first issue, we are excited to feature engaging articles touching on a plethora of subjects. In the coming pages, these student authors focus on topics ranging from mutual aid in modern museums and reimagining site-specific artwork to intimate artistic reflections during times of crisis. Each essay exemplifies stimulating scholarship and offers insight into modes of resilience expressed through art and cultural production throughout the art world, whether in the past, present, or looking forward. Above all, these explorations on this theme display the resilience of art itself: art as a creative outlet, art as a means of bringing people together, and art as an expression of human experience in a world that is becoming increasingly impersonal and automated. We hope you learn as much from the articles as we have and that they mark only the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

In fact, we are already looking forward to sparking new conversations with our next themed issue on the topic of “Art and Identity.” Keep your eyes open for a call for papers soon! We welcome returning and new undergraduate contributors from all fields.

As we send our first issue out into the world, we are thrilled to say that JAHMS came out better than we ever could have imagined. A big thank you to all the applicants, peer-reviewers, and anyone who worked on this issue; you all are the reason this inaugural issue is out, and it is dedicated to all of you.

Happy reading,
The JAHMS Editorial Board – Andrew, Sera, Rachel, and Katie
Many of Yang Yongliang’s landscapes are illusions. From a distance, they resemble traditional Chinese ink landscape paintings, albeit enlarged and edited, but close inspection reveals mountains composed of looming high-rises, coastlines of accumulated debris, and birds replaced by construction cranes (Fig. 1). In *Phantom Landscape III – Forbidden City* (2007), Yang undermines the illusion he establishes in other works in the series, stopping the viewer from reading the landscape as a historic painting (Fig. 2). He still evokes the conventions of *shanshuihua* (“mountain-and-water”) ink paintings, such as the heavy use of mist, the rising skyscrapers that evoke cascading mountains, and the inclusion of seals and colophons. However, the landscape is obstructed by traffic signs that emerge from the mist. They are impossibly large and eclipse cars, telephone wires, and building complexes. The traffic signs also interrupt the multiple ways to navigate the space of *Phantom Landscape III - Forbidden City*. When regarding smaller fragments of the city, one can try to make sense out of its familiar logic, recognizing narrow streets that vanish in the distance or the sight of skyscrapers looming high above. On a compositional level, the work contains enough elements of *shanshuihua* painting to be recognizable, and one can see how urban structures coagulate and form hills and valleys, mountains and streams. Yet, the traffic signs disrupt both the individual vignettes of urban life and the larger impression of a fantastical landscape. The signs confront the viewer, making clear the inherent artifice of this impossible scene.

In his work on urbanization and Chinese photography, Jiang Jiehong considers the implications of constant environmental transformation for contemporary Chinese art, especially regarding the function and veracity of photography. He notes how neighborhoods and old buildings in Chinese cities are being torn down and rebuilt so rapidly that artists face significant issues in representing the city. Jiang asks: As daily changes are experienced as part of urban existence, what does China really look like, and what are the relationships between...
In his Phantom Landscape series, Yang demonstrates one approach to contending with these rapid transformations by representing the city through montage. These landscapes are composites of Yang's photographs of Shanghai, digitally edited together to resemble shanshuihua paintings. Yang's digital photomontages undermine the authority of the individual photograph, instead using fragments of many decontextualized images to characterize the discordance, alienation, and violence produced by rapid urbanization. Yang's Phantom Landscapes are constructed images of a city that exists in the uncanny space between real and unreal, imagination and memory.

Transforming Shanshuihua in Phantom Landscape 1 – No. 1

While Yang works primarily with photography, he was trained in traditional Chinese painting, supplemented with philosophy, aesthetics, and art criticism. After completing his art education, Yang studied commercial graphic design and attempted to work as a graphic designer before pursuing a career as an artist. In his photography, Yang incorporates the forms and symbols of traditional painting with the methods of graphic design and new media. Drawing on Confucian and Taoist ideals, landscape paintings could function as expressions of philosophical or personal beliefs. Scholar-bureaucrats depicted a world where they lived harmoniously with nature and did not attempt to subjugate or suppress it. When landscape paintings included human figures, the figures were typically small in comparison to the vast landscapes, acting as wanderers who are learning from the beauty of the natural world. These idealized nature scenes also allow space for the movement of qi, or the vital energy that flows through the universe. They are simultaneously informed by human beliefs and desires but portray worlds untouched by human hands. Of course, the ideal of untouched, harmonious nature was often at odds with the large-scale construction projects undertaken by governments throughout Chinese history, so landscape paintings likely express more of a nostalgic ideal rather than a genuine representation of historic interactions with nature. Shanshuihua paintings should not be regarded as an easy representation of the relationship between scholar-bureaucrats and nature, but rather as thoughtful idealizations that incorporated both conventions and individual temperaments, interests, political goals, and/or philosophical contents.

Ming Dynasty painter Shen Zhou painted Lofty Mount Lu (1467) as a tribute to his teacher, using the strength and impressiveness of the mountain as metaphors for his teacher’s virtues (Fig. 3). In Phantom Landscape 1 – No. 1, Yang recreates Lofty Mount Lu through photomontage (Fig. 4). Yang’s interpretation of the painting eradicates the eclecticism and personality that Shen was known for, reimagining the unique natural formations of the mountain as identical high-rises. While the blank space of Shen's original implies moving water, the white mist of Yang's version has an eerie, surreal character, evoking the thick smog that pervades cities like Shanghai. Even the inscriptions and seals are transformed; starting in the Song Dynasty, artists inscribed poems and added seals to fill space, enhance a painting, and guard against forgery. In Phantom Landscape 1 – No. 1, the inscriptions are random website addresses, and the seals are...
Yang’s transformation of *Lofty Mount Lu* speaks to the alienating effects of urban experience globally, but also to his specific experiences witnessing the cycles of demolition and construction in Shanghai. He was born in the town of Jiading near Shanghai, later incorporated into the city as Jiading District. After the town was incorporated, historic sites were torn down, apartment complexes and commercial structures went up, and the new buildings featured facsimiles of historic sites meant to appeal to tourists by replicating historic Chinese aesthetics. Yang’s ironic mimicry of *Lofty Mount Lu* replicates these processes of destruction, construction, and mimicry, the replacement of tradition with ersatz approximations. At first glance, the parallels between the compositions of *Phantom Landscape 1 – No. 1* echo *Lofty Mount Lu* are apparent, as the gradations of light and dark buildings in Yang’s photomontage mimic the dramatic contrasts in Shen Zhou’s painting. However, the composition of *Lofty Mount Lu* relies on fluidity, as the natural forms in the upper and lower halves of the composition are connected. Yang severs this connection, instead contrasting the pristine, uniform towers of the upper half and the squat buildings below that threaten to slip into the mist at any moment.

Phantom Landscapes n°07 and the Strategies of Photomontage

While scholars like Chang Tan and Chu Kiu-Wai have elucidated the critical implications of Yang’s landscapes — namely, the critique inherent in reimagining *shanshuihua* paintings as urban ruins and skyscrapers — few have focused on his methods. Yang’s photomontages stand within a larger tradition of...
pastiche – of collage, montage, assemblage – that is significant to both European and Chinese critiques of urban life. Artists of the inter-war period, including European Dadaists and Chinese satirists, used photomontage to represent the violence, allure, and sensations of urban life and to criticize both politics and the apparent objectivity of the photograph.

Yang's use of photomontage continues this critical tradition while incorporating new technologies to better characterize the nature of urbanization in contemporary Shanghai.

In inter-war Europe, Dada artists like Tristan Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, and George Grosz created shocking collages that critiqued social, political, and artistic conventions. One Dada artist, Berlin-based Hannah Höch, pioneered the use of photomontage to represent and critique urban experience. Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany (1919–1920) includes a dizzying array of newspaper clippings featuring famous politicians and figures in the art world, disjointed typography, the large crowds and looming buildings of the city, and the wheels, gears, and trappings of machinery, the technological advances that made World War I possible (Fig. 5).

In his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin asserts that Dada artists destroy the “aura” (the authenticity, authority, tradition) of the very works they create.⁹ Andreas Huyssen builds on Benjamin’s insight, establishing how Höch’s photomontages are not a celebration of photography, but a disappointment with the limitations of photography and the need to represent what photography cannot.¹⁰ Cut with the Kitchen Knife attacks the idea of representation itself. Höch eschews composition, perspective, coherence – all images are rendered as fragments, exposed in their artifice and flatness. The act of cutting, rearranging, and pasting exposes the limitations of these images while deconstructing the supposed advances and pleasures of modern life.

About fifteen years after Höch represented Weimar through collage, Shidai manhua (Modern Sketch) magazine released its first issue, which included a collage satirizing the spectacular excess of Shanghai (Fig. 6). After the Opium Wars, Shanghai became a significant Treaty Port and site of a thriving press and humor media, among them the cartoon magazine Shidai manhua, which drew heavily on foreign influences, including American and British humor magazines.¹¹ Like the Dada group, the artists of Shidai manhua were blatantly anti-fascist – the first issue included Ye Qianyu’s The New Lines of Battle? (1934), an expressive print that shows Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler in a shared salute with – and obscuring the face of – a man in traditional Chinese garments (Fig. 7).¹² The magazine also included a collage labeled Shanghai fenjing (“Shanghai landscape”) (1934). This metaphorical “landscape” contains similar elements to Höch’s imagination of Berlin life – the fragmented, disjointed bodies, the anonymous, sexualized women, the focus on amplifying or obscuring eyes, the tilted and inverted bodies that create a sense of movement, like a swirling whirlpool of intoxication and excess.

While Höch locates urban life in mass media photography, this landscape locates the city in sensation – gambling, liquor, sex. William Schaefer notes the “representational violence” generated symbolically (the held gun, the Sikh policeman) and methodologically (the physical cutting and manipulation of bodies), two methods of conveying the danger and vice of inter-war Shanghai.¹³ Cut with the Kitchen Knife and Shanghai fenjing illustrate how inter-war artists cut, fragment, manipulate, and recombine photography to evoke the sensations and trappings of the city, incorporating the advent of new tech-

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**FIG. 5** Hannah Hoch, Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany, 1919-1920 (Statliche Museen, Berlin).

**FIG. 6** Unknown Artist, Shanghai Fengjing (Shanghai Landscape) in Shidai manhua no. 1, 1934.

nologies and the looming shadows of violence and war. In his Phantom Landscape series, Yang responds to the violent transformations of his own lifetime. China’s urbanization is the largest construction project in Earth’s history, a massive undertaking based on authoritarian power, the violent eviction of residents, and the exploitation of migrant workers.¹⁴ As of 2011, over 200 million Chinese people are part of the “floating population,” or people from rural areas who travel to cities like Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou for work. Due to the hukou or household registration system, they are denied access to urban social services like childcare, medical facilities, and some jobs even though their labor makes China’s urbanization possible.¹⁵ This tragic irony is encapsulated in Wang Jin’s 100% (1999), which depicts migrant laborers holding up a highway with their own bodies, making their labor visible and illustrating the exploitation that undergirds advancement (Fig. 8).¹⁶

While the strength of Wang Jin’s critique lies in representation, in making overlooked bodies visible, Yang critiques through omission, through the noticeable lack of people in cities that should be teeming with crowds. Despite his omission of actual bodies, Yang’s Phantom Landscapes are replete with the products of human intervention, including human destruction. Phantom Landscapes n°07 (2007) emphasizes this destruction—the foreground is composed of dirt and detritus, and a pile of broken building materials lies haphazardly on the right side of the composite (Fig. 9). A miniscule bicycle, missing a rider, stands on a patch of cement in front of dirtied, damaged buildings. The scene is framed by misty white, which also pervades the midground. This haziness contrasts with the sharply rendered details of the telephone poles, whose wires extend nowhere, and the smaller, clustered buildings. The skyscrapers in the background are vague, almost transparent, and compressed in space, representing a phantasm rather than a real place accessible to the denizens of the foreground of this work.

Following Marcus Boon’s contention that the fragments of a montage act as metonyms, the spaces of Yang’s work can be read as representations of the people who build them, who live in them, and who both produce and are subjected to the violence of construction and demolition of them.¹⁷ Phantom Landscapes n°07 is defined by disconnection, both in the severing of the telephone wires and the jarring contrast between the exacting detail of the foreground and the ethereal background. Although Yang does not employ the same methods as Höch or the artists of Shidai manhua, he still draws on this tradition of using montage to represent what is otherwise unrepresentable. In doing so, he and the work attack the veracity of the image and the validity of representing...
the city as exclusively the ideals of progress or the ruins of tradition. Furthermore, Yang also utilizes shock in his critique, although his shock is derived from misrecognition – the initial impression of a *shanshuihua* landscape compared with the reality of the image. In his utilization of shock, of unexpected juxtapositions, of creating unreal spaces from disconnected fragments, Yang continues the critical tradition of photomontage evident in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* and *Shanghai fenjing*.

Yet, there is one significant difference between how Dada artists and *Shidai* manhua artists created their photomontages, and how Yang creates his: Yang works completely digitally. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* and *Shanghai fenjing* have tactile, textural qualities. The fragments have distinct edges that reveal the processes of cutting and pasting, a sense of dimension and weight, and clearly delineated boundaries that disappear in Yang’s mist. The physicality of these images reinforces their sensorial elements, especially in *Shanghai fenjing*, with its emphasis on the specific sensorial elements of the city, as it evokes sex, violence, intoxication. While the physical manipulation of photographs represents the excesses of modern urbanism in inter-war Shanghai and Berlin, the intangibility and ambiguity of Yang’s landscapes represent the postmodernism of contemporary Shanghai.

**Phantom Landscapes as Post-Photography**

While artists like Höch attacked the objectivity of the photograph as early as 1919, the advent of digital photography provided new challenges for determining the veracity of a photograph. Kevin Robins coined the term “post-photography” to describe how digital photographs undermine the supposed objectivity of chemical photography, as digital photographs can be manipulated with much higher levels of sophistication, and no longer take physical form or have to represent real things. Robins characterizes digital photographs as a kind of “image-information,” as images can contain information not immediately accessible to the eye through enlargement, manipulation, and deconstruction.¹⁸

Yang’s work is entirely digital, which allows him to control minute details and work on a large scale, with an ease that his predecessors could not have anticipated. For example, *Phantom Landscape II – No. 3* (2007) is approximately two by nine feet, a forebodingly large work that engenders the illusion of a landscape painting because it can be viewed from a distance (Fig. 10). While there are many practical reasons for Yang’s use of digital photomontage, there are also intriguing theoretical implications. After digital manipulation, Yang’s photographs lose their origins and their boundaries and thus lose the palpable contrast evident in historic photomontage. Yang’s landscapes have the detail and specificity of real, recognizable places, yet form impossible scenes, no longer representing physical space but the experience of a city constantly in transition. Yang formulates his experiences of Shanghai not in the physical sensation of *Shanghai fenjing*, but in the buildings disappearing into mist, in the spaces of ambiguity, of loss. The collapsing boundaries between real and imagined space create what Jiang describes as “the instability of what has been seen.”

Post-photography also challenges the idea that a camera is comparable to the human eye; Mark Hansen distinguishes between the machinic form of perception, mere sight, and the human form of perception, an embodied, affective form of seeing. People do not passively see their environment but construct their

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**FIG. 10** Yang Yongliang, *Phantom Landscape II – No. 3*, 2007.
perception informed by experience, a process more comparable to a computer, with its capacity to process information. When Yang creates his representations of Shanghai, he constructs the city from historical memory and fragments of dozens of sites, producing impressions of places that may no longer exist but have emotional resonance. Digital manipulation allows Yang to build landscapes that evoke the complexities of experiencing a place beyond the limitations of the camera. Yang's digital landscapes contain enough detail and specificity to feel real without being limited by the challenges of literally representing a transforming city.

Yang’s Phantom Landscapes series addresses the challenges of representing Shanghai when the city is constantly in transition due to the demands of rapid urbanization. Through his invocation of historic ink painting, Yang elucidates how urbanization impacts the psyche of the city resident, replacing the idealization of shanshuihua with the reality of demolition and new ruins. His use of photomontage also continues a twentieth-century tradition of questioning the supposed empiricism of the photograph and highlighting the violence of fragmenting and manipulating impressions of places that may no longer exist and fragments of dozens of sites, producing impressions of places that may no longer exist.

Notes

8. Wang, Urbanization and Contemporary Chinese Art, 123.
Within the German Expressionist movement, the focus has been on male leaders and artists, their works being the basis of Expressionist revitalization. Barbara Wright describes this form of exclusion in her discussion of Expressionist writers, but it is applicable to artists of the movement as well. According to Wright, the lack of feminine perspective is a direct outcome of this rejection of female artists.¹ The irony of this male focus is explained by Griselda Pollock in her essay on women in modernism. She points out that even though the foundation of modern art is the expression of inner emotion of the artist, thus making the art “intrinsically feminine,” female artists are not given the same recognition as compared to their male counterparts.² Käthe Kollwitz manages to break out of this mode of female rejection to create works of art that are powerful through their sentimental value. Her use of etchings, woodcuts, lithographs, and the mother motif allows her works to evoke strength through quiet emotion, and her switch to a non-conformist attitude towards war places her work in a category separate from other Expressionists.

Kollwitz’s images before the death of her son focus on the profound suffering during war on the battlefield. She viewed this sacrifice as necessary as stated in her own writings.³ Claire Whitner, in her book discussing Kollwitz and femininity in relation to war, explains that the Peasant’s War series (c. 1902-08) presents women within the context of war as provocateurs rather than complicit bystanders.⁴ In Outbreak (1908) (Fig. 1) Kollwitz places the woman at the front and center of the print giving her the spotlight despite the woman’s facing away from the viewer. Her focus is on the people she leads into battle. With arms raised and fists forming, the woman’s cry of war amidst the violence can be heard ringing over the field. The men going into battle look to her for guidance, and she answers their call, with body contorting. Although here she is not depicted with a child by her side, the concept of woman as the mother to all the people of the nation had been established by the time Outbreak was printed, according to Christine Bentley, describing maternal femi-

FIG. 1 Käthe Kollwitz, Outbreak, 1903 (The British Museum, London).
The woman is then mother to all; she understands and encourages the sacrifice needed from the men going into war to protect the country. In *Battlefield* (1907) (Fig. 2), a mother searches for her dead son in the carnage left behind from the battle. The only light of the etching comes from her hands as she inspects a soldier’s face. Kollwitz included these images in her *Peasant’s War* cycle to display the sacrifices she believed necessary for social revolution. Pushing the emotionality of, as well as the violence behind, the images, she interacts with the viewers’ empathy as Germany’s sons continue to suffer for a just cause.

Historians have compared Kollwitz’s depiction of femininity and motherhood to Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (1498-99) (Fig. 4) and its representation of the Virgin Mary. Mary mourns the loss of her son but recognizes and finds strength in the necessity of that sacrifice. That same justification therefore is placed into Kollwitz’s work: mothers have a specific understanding of this sacrifice, accepting “the necessity for one generation to shed its blood for the good of those to come.” Kollwitz is justifying the ideology as her own son’s volunteering. She described in her writings her “heroic fantasy” and “dream” of fighting alongside her father and brother in battle. Her self-identification with the female figure in *Outbreak* allows her to live out this dream within her art. Kollwitz supported the violence at the time, and her works still show a feminine strength and power. However, this frequent comparison to the *Pietà* causes her works to be seen as too sentimental, with critics saying the power of the images has been weakened by its overtly emotional content. Such an understanding ignores the quiet strength within the suffering portrayed in Kollwitz’s etchings. The Virgin Mary brings a concept of protection to the children or people of a nation, a concept that Kollwitz used to push her own ideals through her art. Understanding that there is, in fact, no need to portray an outwardly strong or masculine appearance to have power, Kollwitz places a spotlight on the character that holds the weight of a nation’s culture on her shoulders: the mother.

After the death of her son, Kollwitz’s views on sacrifice shift. No longer does she support the need for a selfless sacrifice. Instead, she focuses on how the damages of war affect society and culture long after a war has ended. In her *War* series, published in 1923, Kollwitz re-orient her perspective from the battlefield and instead shows the viewer how the war continues in the home, embracing pacifism in the process. Ingrid Sharp points out that Kollwitz’s work shows her art in a new light, focusing on the impact of war on individuals and families rather than on the battlefield.

FIG. 2 Käthe Kollwitz, *Battlefield*, 1907 (Minneapolis Institute of Art).


FIG. 4 Michaelangelo, *Pietà*, 1498-1499 (St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City).
out that contemporary critics argued that Kollwitz was offering a compromised moral witness to war, as direct witnesses were most likely male soldiers from the field.¹² As a response, Kollwitz combated this invalidation of her work by offering a different perspective. Her series brings to light the quiet suffering of the familiar motherly figure mourning her loss. The concept of the “spiritual mother” is used again in this series strategically, with Kollwitz herself describing the mother as a “cultivator” of men and culture.¹³ The mother is then responsible for the future of the nation, and her suffering is reflective of the nation’s suffering. The concept of the spiritual mother utilized by Kollwitz brings a sense of familiarity to the dark tones of the series. Her unique visual representation of responsibility makes her series relevant within German culture and allows Kollwitz to portray a strength in femininity that is not normally shown.

Focusing on two prints from the War series in particular, The Widow I (1922–23) (Fig. 5) and The People (1922–23) (Fig. 6), Kollwitz uses her skillful compositional work to portray a quiet strength that is present during grief. With the absence of a direct presence of violence, the strength must come from within the women and the images themselves. Looking at the female figures, their hands seem too large for their small frames and too rugged for a life without hardship. They showcase the history behind their current story. Strong hands offer comfort to the widow holding herself in their series relevant within German culture and allows Kollwitz to portray a strength in femininity that is not normally shown.


FIG. 7 Käthe Kollwitz, Never Again War!, 1924 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.).

contends that Kollwitz was conscious in her journal entries of her need to separate her personal emotions from her work to create a valid image, recasting her own grief into emotional artistic expression.¹⁴ When her works are described as too sentimental, they are under mined; it is the emotionality of the work that influences the viewers’ interpretation. This emotionality is best transcribed through the technical skills required to create her prints. In her earlier etchings, the aggressive medium imbues a sense of action into the print. There is energy within the still image, the scenes still buzzing from battle. Repeatedly cutting into the plate with acid to create her image, Kollwitz imbues the prints in her Peasant’s War series with an implied hostility. The deep grooves and jagged cuts in the woodcuts represent the pain and anxiety induced by grief. The War series, as Whitner suggests, emphasizes a tension between the masculine and feminine, since woodcuts are traditionally a more masculine medium. This tension makes the viewer pay more attention to the woman depicted, the dark lines highlighting her inner strength through her grief.¹⁵

When showcasing the damages of war within society, Kollwitz’s works take on a tone that is dark but not overbearing. The quiet distress is a kind that invites reflection and conversation. The message is portrayed through representation and composition, which makes the series well rounded in its overall effectiveness. When she directly depicts her message of pacifism, the tone in her works lightens. In Never Again War! (1924) (Fig. 7) there are no
more aggressive cuts as she calls for peace. The lithographic medium lends itself to more feathery strokes, eliminating the invasive methods of her previous etched prints. The image is drawn onto – rather than cut into – the plate, articulating Kollwitz’s message of peace to the viewer. The anxiety effected by the dark tone of her former prints is now gone, as Kollwitz is no longer depicting how war can ravage a culture beyond the battlefield. Instead, she shows the power in understanding the lightness that pacifism can bring.

Kollwitz’s journey with violence and sacrifice did not make her leave behind her integrity when depicting maternal feminism. Kollwitz’s tactical switches in media allowed her to convey her message subconsciously to the viewer while maintaining her imagery of strength through femininity and grief. Throughout Kollwitz’s works on the theme of war and its consequences, there is a clear sense of the mother as protector and creator, always worthy of reverence.

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Notes

6. Ibid., 930-931.
9. Ibid., 1111.
11. Ibid., 930.
15. Whitner, Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War,
Contemporary Middle Eastern and North African artists are tasked with synthesizing post-colonial identity with notions of authenticity. For many, this necessitates engagement with stereotypes and Orientalist fantasies. Lalla Essaydi, Shirin Neshat, and Hassan Hajjaj are three artists whose works demonstrate the hybridity that, according to Homi Bhabha, is folded into the post-colonial expression of identity. Each of these artists has lived in two distinct cultural spaces, each experiencing the contrasting and overlapping aspects of hybrid identity. In the works they have created, they innovatively employ architectural structures, inviting viewers to consider the phenomenology of women living in these intermediary spaces. Space functions differently for each artist, allowing exploration and interaction in distinct ways. By anchoring their figures in architecture and turning the gaze away from the colonial subjects, each artist considers the stereotypes embedded in the Orientalist fantasy of women with an innovative approach to representation.

To be viewed as authentic, artists working in the “Orient” must doubly reckon with inconsistencies of historic representation and synthesize tradition and modernity. The Orientalist fantasy, coined by Edward Said, revolves around the production of a narrative about the “Orient” by the West. The discourses that construct this fantasy are entirely separate from the reality of individuals’ lived experiences. Artists representing the “Orient” must find ways to reject the aspects of these fantasies that are false without rejecting tradition as a whole. At the same time, individuals in post-colonial settings must synthesize tradition with modernity. Mitra Rastegar, in writing about contemporary Iranian literature, identifies a challenge created in the binary between the Occident, which is “modern, rational, and dynamic,” and the “static, irrational, and antimodern” Orient. In this duality, the colonial subject is forced to choose between the realm of their own histories — cast as monolithic — or to become modernized and dynamic by assuming characteristics of the colonizer.

Essaydi’s *Harem* photo series, Neshat’s *Soliloquy* video installation, and Hajjaj’s *Kesh*...
Angels series each explore a version of a hybrid identity that synthesizes the “Occident” with the “Orient” and negotiates the relationship between tradition and modernity. By combining elements of both ends of this spectrum, these artists are able to respond individually to these binaries. Bhabha outlines hybridity as a tool that colonial subjects use to navigate post-colonial identity. Colonialists distinguish themselves from their subjects by relying on processes of “othering.” To achieve this, as Said elucidates, the Orientalist fantasy is fabricated not because it reflects reality, but because it can be produced to delineate the lines between the colonialist and colonial subject. By othering the subject, by formulating a view of the “Orient,” the colonizer not only paints themselves as more objective and scientific but as more advanced. Through hybridity, though, the colonial subject regains agency by appropriating colonial aesthetics and means of representation and then repurposing them in a way that disclaims their power. In this, those who have been disempowered are both recognizable by colonial powers and given agency to enact this presentation on their own terms. Through the creation of the hybrid identity, “denied” knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse, allowing individuals to turn a critical gaze back upon the colonizer and challenge their authority. Thus, the discriminatory power of the colonial gaze is appropriated to serve the colonial subject, transforming them from object to subject.

The three artists under consideration here all situate their subjects in architectural settings that denote a specific cultural space. This is particularly significant when considering these works through the framework of phenomenology, which emphasizes the embodied nature of experience and perception. Maurice Merleau-Ponty outlines this in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) by rejecting the Cartesian model that equates personhood singularly with consciousness. Descartes’ theory separates consciousness from the body, but Merleau-Ponty instead posits that it is only through “direct contact with . . . existence” that individuals can know themselves. In this way, sensory experience is an integral factor in making meaning.

In the case of Essaydi, Neshat, and Hajjaj’s works, considering the identity of women in the “Orient” is necessarily anchored in the spaces they inhabit; their placement in specific architectural settings contributes to their experience in a way a studio setting, for example, would not allow for. With this framework, the situation of Essaydi, Neshat, and Hajjaj’s figures in particular spaces is not merely the backdrop of meditation on their identities but rather a meaningful component of the message. These spaces are a stage on which they are able to negotiate identity. While the figures themselves are treated differently in the three artists’ works, the women are all firmly anchored in the aesthetics of the “Ori- ent” through their placements. Essaydi and Hajjaj each photograph women in Marrakesh, Morocco—Essaydi within a palace and Hajjaj on the streets. Neshat’s installation features images of two cities, one in the West and the other in West Asia. If these projects are read as representations of hybridity, the ways in which the figures interact with their spaces is demonstrative of the ways in which hybridity can be navigated. In what follows, I explore each artist’s work individually as well in comparison to each other. What emerges in this analysis is the role that the representation of distinct architectural spaces play in the ongoing negotiation of hybrid identity.

The harem of the Moroccan palace Dar al-Basha is integral to the way in which we understand the legacies of Orientalism in Essaydi’s *Harem* photographic series. As is seen in *Harem #29* (Fig. 1), the women featured are dressed in ornately patterned fabrics matching the architecture around them. They are the focal points of the photos, which are composed of the women directly in the center of the frames, gazing out at the viewer. Yet, they fade into their backgrounds, blending into the structures around them, implying that their personhood is somehow tied to the spaces they inhabit. This effect highlights the embodied nature of experience and, in turn, of identity. This is further explored in the calligraphic henna on the women’s skin in many of the photos. Essaydi elaborates on the cultural symbolism of henna, which is integral to the lives of Moroccan women and associated with major celebrations. However, the process of application is painstaking, taking as long as nine hours. These combined elements emphasize the physicality of cultural influences and experiences, which manifest corporeally in Essaydi’s series.

Essaydi places her figures specifically in the harem of Dar al-Basha to engage with the Orientalist fantasy of space. The title of the series calls on a narrative of the harem as a hyper-sexual space. This idea is an Orientalist invention, completely separate from the reality of a harem, which functions as space in a house reserved for women where men were not allowed, with no sexual connotation outside of the Orientalist fantasy. This connotation of the harem underlies the aesthetic fusion of the women in the *Harem* series with their architectural setting. The stereotype of a harem girl is folded into the Orientalist understanding of the space as a whole; she becomes part of the fantasy based on context, on her location in the harem. However, by entering this forbidden space, Essaydi is able to undermine the fantasy of the Orientalist. In this series, Essaydi calls on the Orientalist painting tradition by positioning the models in poses evocative of paintings like Renoir’s *Odalisque* (Fig. 2). *Harem #2* similarly features women languishing in semi-seductive poses. Foundational to the reading of this fantasy, though, is their setting in the harem. In this way, Essaydi approaches the stereotype of the harem girl from within, immersing her models in the aesthetics of the fantasy from the interior of the harem to consider its implications.

Essaydi’s choice of medium in photography also delves into associations with Orientalist fantasy. Photography has been tied to the production of knowledge about the Middle East since its conception. Only seven years after the creation of the daguerreotype, Orientalist painter Horace Vernet and daguerreotypist Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet visited Egypt to document antiques, starting a trend for

travel photographers to trek across the Middle East capturing monuments and tourist sites. This emphasis on antiquities and ruins produced a conception of the Middle East as being a sentimental and mysterious space, disjointed from modernity. As a means by which colonial powers were able to construct and enforce narratives about the “Orient,” the choice of the photographic medium situates contemporary photographers — like Essaydi — in a mode of representation accepted and trusted by the “Occident.” For Europeans, photography represented an approach to learning about the “other” in a way that appeared to be objective “thus critically enabling the Orientalist will to knowledge.” By employing photography to document places in the Middle East, Europeans sold the Orientalist fantasy as reality. Through this process, photographic mediation solidified the Euro-American perception of themselves as ambivalent onlookers, capable of producing objective knowledge about “the other,” a necessary step in constructing power. Because photography so closely parallels the development of knowledge about the “Orient,” contemporary artists working in the medium necessarily carry this history in their own representations.

Essaydi engages with this history of documentary voyeurism, using photos as a tool to adjust the power dynamic such that the colonial subject becomes the gazer, rather than being gazed at. She adopts the Orientalist fantasy of the harem girl but uses Bhabha’s tool of hybridity to highlight the inconsistencies in the Orientalist fantasy. In 

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\text{Harem} \ 1, \ \text{Essaydi incorporates these modes of representation in particular. The columns and lines of the room seem to recede directly back in space, leading to the woman reclining in the niche. This neat recession of space is reminiscent of Renaissance paintings that create the illusion of depth through linear perspective. Further, dividing the single image into three separate frames evokes the triptych composition generally associated with Christian reli-
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...jious girls. Each of these compositional decisions recalls traditional Western techniques, but tactical shifts — such as subverting the subject’s challenging gaze — have the effect of hybridization. In this, Bhabha outlines, “the presence of power” is visible but not given the authority of control to present the identity of the Harem girls.

Like Essaydi, Neshat purposefully selects architectural settings to explore our understanding of the “Orient” and “Occident.” In her video installation, Stililoquy, Neshat realizes a representation of the hybrid self, one pictured in two locations. Neshat created this video installation after returning from the U.S. to Iran following the Iranian Revolution. The artist presents clips of herself in different spaces: one in the “Orient,” the other in the “Occident.” Exhibited as two projections on facing walls, each video features a view of Neshat. In one, she appears “in traditional veil surrounded by Middle Eastern architecture, history, memories,” while in the other she wears the same clothes, appearing “alone amidst Western hypermodern architecture.” The projections begin with a slow panoramic view of two different landscapes. The first presents an “arid desert landscape of mosques, buildings faced with tile, and sand-covered ruins,” presumably a city in West Asia, the second filled with highways and skyscrapers, an industrialized and urban city in the West. Each video cuts to a view of Neshat looking out a window at the two cityscapes.

This introduction serves a similar function as does the setting of Dar al-Basha in Essaydi’s Harem series. The beginning of these videos situates each manifestation of Neshat in a distinct cultural space; the viewer is moved through the architectural landscapes to arrive at two views of Neshat, situating each video in a different setting. Just as Essaydi inverts the gaze of her subjects to reappropriate the power of the voyeur, the gaze also functions as a source of power in Stililoquy. After the panoramic views of the landscapes, both videos settle on a silhouette of a woman looking out of a window; outside of one window is the skyline of a city in the West dominated by skyscrapers, while the other is a city in West Asia. The frames each rotate until we see the women head-on, their faces revealed to us. The woman in the West Asia frame walks away from the window while the woman in the modern city frame stays facing the camera. This juxtaposition effectively turns the gaze away from the women, jolting the sense of voyeurism and reappropriating the power of looking.

Neshat delves into the phenomenological experiences of each manifestation of herself, formulating a hybrid self in the process. Initially, the woman in the industrialized city watches longingly as her counterpart moves throughout the city. While the woman in the West seems simply to sit with her city as a backdrop, the other woman physically engages with her surroundings. The roles reverse at some point as the two women take turns watching each other move through the city. Just as Essaydi’s use of patterned clothing fuses her figures with the architectural setting, Neshat’s depiction of the women wandering through each city functionally demonstrates their engagement with each cultural setting. The backdrop reiterates the impact of physical spaces upon these experiences. While the two women are identical (indeed, both are played by Neshat herself), the contrasting experiences are highlighted individually by their movement through different city spaces.
Throughout Soliloquy, the woman who stays at the window assumes the power of the gaze — looking at both video of the woman in West Asia and at the viewer. Neshat orients the videos to engage with the complex relationship between viewer and subject. While the twisting of frames in the introduction moves the viewer of the installation into a position of being gazed upon, Neshat remains the subject of the projections as she also looks upon herself from the opposite wall. In effect, the viewer is stuck somewhere between the role of the voyeur and the object of the gaze as they are situated between two facing projections. Through this contradictory role of the viewer, Neshat reappropriates the gaze as Bhabha outlines in the use of hybridity. However, the viewer is not completely placed in the role of the Orientalist, who objectifies and commodifies the colonial subject. Instead, the experience of the viewer simulates Neshat’s own experience, navigating a place between two contrasting cultures, forced to constantly look back and forth between the two. The artist implies an internal conflict as she, in the video installation, is faced with a contradiction between completely assuming the role of the dynamic, modern voyeur or the traditional, stagnant subject.

Through the identification of these contrasting experiences, Neshat demonstrates the simultaneous necessity and complications of hybridity. Complimentary depictions of the seeming opposites — modernity and tradition, East and West — highlight the limits and fulfillment of both ends of this spectrum. As Neshat follows these manifestations of herself in and out of spaces, she achieves an effect that is transitional, with emphasis on the instability of each experience. While Essayed’s setting in Dar al-Basha, specifically in the harem, places her in a space that is identifiably read as Moroccan, Neshat demonstrates more turbulence, creating restlessness between the two opposing perspectives of the projections. As each woman watches the other move around the city — both the distinctly “modern” and “ancient” spaces — viewers are confronted with a sense of the imagined construct of each. Neither space seems complete, as the women look longingly at each other. In this sense, the women’s movement in and out of their spaces parallels the sense that they navigate a relationship with tradition and with modernity, without choosing a single side of this false binary. Essaydi anchors her photos in Dar al-Basha’s harem in order to delve into misconceptions about the space. In Soliloquy, the turbulence of each video and the sense that the two representations complement each other allows Neshat to highlight the necessity of hybridity to synthesize tradition with modernity.

Yet there is a sense that neither the viewer nor the women in the videos is able to find resolution in either distinct space that complicates a view of the hybrid self that seamlessly fuses aspects of identity. Instead, Neshat elaborates on the constant negotiations that occur to formulate an entirely fulfilling sense of self.

Unlike Essaydi and Neshat’s approach, Hajjaj moves outside of architectural spaces, depicting a group of female motorcyclists on the streets of Marrakesh in his multimedia photographic works. Whereas Essaydi explores the interior of Orientalist fantasies by immersing her figures in stereotypes, Hajjaj moves outside of the harem and into the city with a rebellious response to tradition. When discussing her choice to set her series inside, Essaydi elaborates that “[t]raditionally, the presence of men has defined public spaces.” With this in mind, in the same way that working from within Dar al-Basha allows Essaydi to immerse her images in the aesthetics of the Orientalist fantasy, Hajjaj’s placement of the ‘Kesh Angels in a public setting pointedly disrupts this perception of tradition. Further, Hajjaj frames his photos with consumer goods like soup cans, contributing to the hybridization of his installations. As he engages with the streets of Marrakesh, highlighting the liveliness both of the ‘Kesh Angels and of the city itself, Hajjaj disrupts the binary view of a stagnant “Orient.”

The architectural setting of photos like ‘Kesh Angels, in which the women pose in front of the Theatre Royal in Marrakesh, situates viewers in Morocco. This is solidified both with the title of the series, as well as through photos like Love Maroc in which the women don fabric over their faces with the word “Morocco” written on it. Although taking to the streets of Morocco, rather than the interior of a palace like Dar al-Basha, the entire series is decisively anchored in the country. Through this, Hajjaj moves away from the Orientalist stereotype of the underdeveloped and mysterious “Orient” filled with ruins that were produced through Orientalist photography. Instead, he emphasizes the modernity and vibrancy of the city, and, in turn, of the individuals living in it by illustrating a version of Bhabha’s hybrid identity. Hajjaj’s choice of colorful settings and clothing, as well as the playful poses of the women featured, is seamlessly fused with tradition. Although the women wear traditional clothing, sporting a veil and djellaba, covering their entire faces in the case of ‘Kesh Angels, the patterns and colors of their outfits subvert the stereotype of the veiled woman. When writing about the photographic projects of Neshat, Igor Zabel outlines the expectations of the veiled woman who becomes a strict religious fanatic, void of individuality and independence under the Orientalist fantasy. Although the women are veiled, their individuality and independence are accentuated. They wear vibrant colors and playful patterns, like polka-dots in Biker. Posing defiantly and mischievously with their motorcycles, the ‘Kesh Angels seem to propel themselves into modernity, but decidedly without disavowing traditional forms or their Moroccan identities.

Hajjaj also demonstrates hybrid identity through stylistic markers. Consistently compared to the style of Andy Warhol, Hajjaj draws inspiration from the Pop Art movement, which is primarily manifested in his framing of photos with commodity goods. The soup cans lining the frame of M., for example, directly reference Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup Cans. In an interview with Vogue, Hajjaj commented on the perception of Morocco as being “limited to the Sahara, mint tea, and kaftans.” In place of this, Hajjaj highlights the overlap between the West and Morocco. Drawing in aesthetic cues from such a distinctly modern style, Hajjaj packages his imagining of Morocco in representational modes that are recognizable for Western audiences. In this, Hajjaj undermines the colonial urge to “otherize” individuals in the “Orient” by manifesting similarities between these two binaries. Despite these overlaps, Hajjaj maintains distinctions to Marrakesh, highlighting the inconsistencies in viewing North Africa through the colonial lens that flattens the culture and people to antiquity.

The placement in the urban environment creates a sense of national pride and dignity; as Essaydi rejects elements of her architectural
setting, Hajjaj welcomes them. If the “Harem” series undermines the ways in which the harems are fused with women's individual identities, Hajjaj instead embraces the connectivity between the ‘Kesh Angels and their city. While Neshat embodies restlessness and discomfort in Soliloquy, moving between two cities, Hajjaj presents images of women entirely at ease in their environment. Their poses and handling of motorbikes are commanding and deliberate. In images like Love Maroc, the women not only look back at the viewer, demanding the power of the gaze, but also pose commandingly by leaning over their bikes with undeniable swagger. The gaze and confidence of these figures show control of their environment as they, in turn, embody the vibrancy of the city as a whole. Through a phenomenological approach, Hajjaj achieves this sense of the women's comfort by constructing the urban environment as a freeing and vibrant space. Rather than being relegated to the harem, for example, the ‘Kesh Angels are actively engaged in the city, both comfortable and commanding.

In each of their works, these three artists navigate hybrid identity by combining aesthetics and forms both from the “Occident” and from the “Orient.” In doing so, they are able to expose binaries between the two that relegate the Middle East and North Africa to monolithic and stagnant cultures. By situating their figures in architectural settings that the artists’ subjects interact with these structures parallel the means by which their figures — and by extension the artists — navigate stereotypes and contradictions in their own identities. By negotiating false oppositions between the “Oriental” and the “Occident” — between tradition and modernity — these artists subvert these stereotypes. Recapturing the authority to “other” the Middle East and North Africa, Essaydi, Neshat, and Hajjaj present versions of a hybrid self that allocates agency to the women photographed rather than to the Western voyeur. By creating their own complex narratives of spaces, all three artists invite more honest conversations about the women they photograph and the worlds they occupy.

In each artist’s work, architectural structures anchor the images in a particular cultural setting; the ways in which the artists’ subjects interact with these structures parallel the means by which their figures — and by extension the artists — navigate stereotypes and contradictions in their own identities. By negotiating false oppositions between the “Oriental” and the “Occident” — between tradition and modernity — these artists subvert these stereotypes. Recapturing the authority to “otherize” the Middle East and North Africa, Essaydi, Neshat, and Hajjaj present versions of a hybrid self that allocates agency to the women photographed rather than to the Western voyeur. By creating their own complex narratives of spaces, all three artists invite more honest conversations about the women they photograph and the worlds they occupy.

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Notes
5. Ibid., 156.
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 274.
13. Ibid.
Nazi plundering, displacement of art during World War II, and the restitution of The Woman in Gold

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Introduction: Nazi Plunder

During World War II, Nazi Germany created a systematic movement of plundering and looting art from occupied countries. This organized movement was led by Adolf Hitler. Before he became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933, during Hitler’s youth he was an aspiring yet largely unsuccessful artist. In an attempt to make a career out of his artistic aspirations, Hitler applied to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in 1907. Although he passed the initial entrance exam, his drawing abilities were eventually deemed unsatisfactory, and he was rejected admission to the academy. One year later, after moving to the city of Vienna, Hitler reapplied to the same art academy. He was once again rejected. In 1909, Hitler began finding some success as an artist in Vienna, selling tourists small paintings that he mostly copied from postcards. A few years later, Hitler moved to Munich, where he gained more success in his art career and even developed a handful of loyal customers who commissioned paintings from him.¹

Hitler’s career as an artist ended abruptly when the Munich police discovered in 1914 that he had avoided the military draft in Linz. Shortly after being tracked down by the authorities, Hitler voluntarily enlisted into the military. The years of Hitler’s failed art career and military involvement helped fuel his rise to power. The rejection and frustration that Hitler experienced as an aspiring artist also drove his hatred of modern art, which he deemed a “degenerate product of Jews…and a threat to the German national identity.”² From the first day that Hitler held office as Führer in 1933, his goal was to create a “pure Germanic Empire.”³ He wanted to rid the world of abstract, unfinished works of art, and he despised artwork created by Jewish, anti-war, and leftist artists.⁴ Anything Hitler declared unsuitable was to be destroyed (or paradoxically was to be showcased publicly as examples of degenerate art).

FIG. 1  Gustav Klimt, Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I, 1907 (Neue Galerie, New York).
When the war broke out in 1939, panicked evacuations of artworks began all across Europe, in private and public collections. Paintings and sculptures were carted away and hidden, statues were encased and buried, even pictures were removed from their frames and sealed in containers. Museums made huge efforts to vacate their exhibitions and hide their treasures in new locations. The Louvre, for example, packed up its massive collection and transported it numerous times during the war in order to avoid oncoming invasions. Jacques Jaujard, the deputy director of the National Museums in France, realized that war was inevitable when Germany annexed Austria in 1938. He crafted a secret plan to move approximately thirty-six-hundred paintings from the Louvre, as well as monumental statues such as the four-thousand-year-old Seated Scribe and the two-thousand-year-old Winged Victory of Samothrace, which weighs in at three tons. In August of 1939, hundreds of trucks carried more than one-thousand crates of artworks and ancient artifacts to the Château de Cham-bord in the Loire Valley, where they would be safe from potential bombing. The Mona Lisa (1503) was transported in its own ambulance, her crate left unmarked until it safely reached the château.

The displacement of art during World War II was unprecedented. This was the first time in modern history that a war — meant to be housed in and protected by museums — was both plundered and moved on such a scale. The Axis powers moved millions of objects, including statues, sculptures, ancient artifacts, jewelries, and paintings. Hitler’s “ideological, legal, and political arguments put forth to justify the removals” were also unprecedented. Furthermore, the Axis armies had professional art specialists whose task was to secure and preserve the art that was stolen and transported per Hitler’s request. Despite their ugly allegiance to the Axis, these highly trained specialists are the reason for much of the plundered art was protected from being damaged or destroyed, including Gustav Klimt’s Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer (1907), which found its way safely to Vienna’s Austrian Gallery at Belvedere Palace after the war.

Some of the art that was stolen by the Nazis during World War II has since been restored to its rightful owners, many only after decades of searching or lawsuits. However, thousands of pieces have never been returned, and many have never been found. Some works of art were placed into the wrong hands, stuck in museums, or thrown onto the black market. Others remain lost, having never been recovered, perhaps even possibly destroyed.

### Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer

The enthralling beauty of Bloch-Bauer’s blushed gaze in Klimt’s gold-flecked portrait, which is often referred to as The Woman in Gold, reveals nothing of the tragic fate that once lay in store for the painting.

Adele Bauer was born in Vienna in 1881. Her father was a wealthy banker and railway director, and Adele lived a privileged life. She married Ferdinand Bloch at the age of nineteen. Both Bloch-Bauer and Bloch were passionate about art, and they spent their lives collecting and commissioning paintings. The first portrait of Bloch-Bauer was painted when she was only twenty-two years old. There is much speculation that, while posing as the subject for Klimt’s painting, he and Bloch-Bauer became lovers.

Bloch-Bauer’s husband, a wealthy sugar industrialist, had commissioned the golden painting for his wife from Klimt because of his reputation as a renowned artist in Vienna. This was the first of two portraits Klimt would paint for Bloch-Bauer. Klimt painted this portrait of Bloch-Bauer during his “Golden Phase.” This period of his artistic career was marked by prominent use of gold and gold leaf. The portrait depicts Bloch-Bauer wearing a golden gown, adorned in lavish jewelry. Her cheeks are flushed, and she gazes at the viewer “with both vulnerability and pride.” Adding to her vulnerability is Klimt’s choice to depict realistically a deformity of Bloch-Bauer’s. She had one malformed hand, and Klimt chose to depict this in her portrait by painting one misshapen hand awkwardly clasping the other. This is a notable artistic choice because Bloch-Bauer tended to conceal that hand when sitting for portraits.

Klimt used allegory and mythology subtly to depict erotic and feminine symbols in his works. These symbols are present in The Woman in Gold. Bloch-Bauer’s gown, as well as the background behind her, contains symbols in the form of triangles, eyes, and eggs. These symbols are primarily Egyptian, and they project ideals of female sexuality, fertility, femininity, and beauty. Klimt was a symbolist, and his unique employment of these symbols, along with his use of gold leaf, added to the overall value and exceptionality of this portrait.

### Maria Altmann and her family’s story

Maria Viktoria Bloch-Bauer, known as Maria Altmann from her marriage to her husband Bloch-Bauer, was born in 1916, in Vienna, Austria, to Gustav Bloch-Bauer and Therese Bauer. Maria grew up in a wealthy Jewish family and developed close relationships with her aunt Adele and uncle Ferdinand. As a child, Maria was very close to Adele and Ferdinand. She grew up visiting Bloch-Bauer and her husband’s grandi-se house, which was adorned with artwork, porcelain, tapestries, and elegant furniture. Despite the fact that Maria was too young to remember Klimt’s visits to her aunt and uncle, she frequently saw all of the paintings that her uncle Ferdinand had commissioned from Klimt, including The Woman in Gold. In an NPR interview from 2004, she recalled the stunning golden painting of her aunt, as well as five other Klimt paintings that hung in the Bloch-Bauer household. In 1925, that portrait’s subject, her aunt Adele, grew ill with meningitis and, at the age of forty-four, passed away. Klimt’s portrait of Bloch-Bauer allowed her memory to live far beyond her years. Maria Altmann noted that, after her aunt Adele passed, the family would take a moment every Sunday to view Bloch-Bauer’s portrait. In Altmann’s eyes, the portrait of her aunt and the couple’s other paintings were not pricey masterpieces intended for a museum. Rather, they were part of a beautiful collection that her aunt and uncle had developed over the years.

When the Nazis took over Austria in 1938, Altmann and her family were left with nothing but memories of their prized possessions. The Woman in Gold was one of six Klimt paintings that were stolen from the Bloch-Bauer home by Nazis. Bloch-Bauer was so young when she passed away from meningitis that she never lived to see the war. Meanwhile, Bloch was forced to flee Austria in order to escape its union with Nazi Germany. To successfully es-
cape Nazi control, Bloch had to leave all of his belongings behind, including his prized artworks. Everything was left to be plundered by the Nazis.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Altmann had just recently married her husband, Fritz Altmann, when the Nazis came to Austria. As a wedding gift, her uncle Ferdinand had given her the diamond earrings and necklace Bloch-Bauer wore in Klimt’s golden portrait of her. The Nazis, of course, stole the jewelry. Hermann Göring, a high-ranking Nazi official, is said to have been present during the plundering of the Altmann family’s riches. As a result, the gorgeous diamond necklace that Altmann wore on her wedding day ended up on the neck of Göring’s wife. Altmann’s father, a talented cello player, watched his precious Stradivarius cello get taken away by the Nazis. The family’s prized Klimt paintings were also seized, transported elsewhere to be stored for the remainder of World War II.¹⁷

Altmann and her husband lived under house arrest for a time, until they eventually devised a plan of escape. They managed to elude the guards by claiming that Fritz Altmann needed to go to the dentist. Upon escaping the house, the couple fled. They boarded a plane to Cologne, Germany, and then traveled to the Dutch border, where they were guided into the Netherlands and eventually to America. In it, Ferdinand left his entire estate, including Klimt’s portraits, to his nephews and nieces. In it, Ferdinand left his entire estate, including Klimt’s portraits, to his nephews and nieces.²¹

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The Restitution of the Painting

After World War II ended in 1945, The Woman in Gold, along with the five other Klimt paintings owned by the Bloch-Bauer family, surfaced in an Austrian federal art museum called the Galerie Belvedere. The Austrian government claimed that these paintings were willingly given to the museum. This claim was later evaluated and proven false. However, even after the Galerie Belvedere’s assertion of ownership was found to be fraudulent, there still remained many obstacles left to getting the Klimt paintings returned to the rightful owner, Maria Altmann. The Galerie Belvedere put up the strongest fight with The Woman in Gold because she had become a symbol of Austria. Klimt’s portrait of Bloch-Bauer had become so deeply rooted in Austrian culture that she was even referred to as the “Mona Lisa of Austria.”²²

By 1998, the year that Altmann first began her journey to reclaim her family’s stolen paintings, Post-Cold-War revelations and international public opinion had begun to push nations towards further addressing the issue of art displacement that resulted from Nazi plunder during World War II. This was the same year that forty-four countries, including Austria, signed the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated art, which served to develop a “just and fair solution” for victims of Nazi plunder and persecution.²³ Prior efforts that had been made to protect and return displaced artworks to their rightful owners were extremely weak, and the odds of restitution were “crushingly low for so long.”²² Then, at the end of the twentieth century, a new generational attitude toward art restitution emerged. The generational shift was “less interested in covering up historical sins” and determined to expose the ways in which governments, museums, buyers, and dealers had begun systematically to thwart attempts at repatriating valuable art in their possession.²³

The Galerie Belvedere was surely guilty of attempting to prevent restitution of many works of art that had ended up in its museum, including Klimt’s golden portrait of Bloch-Bauer. The Woman in Gold hung in the Galerie Belvedere for decades after its confiscation by the Nazis. Moreover, Austria laid claim to the painting because Bloch-Bauer had left this portrait to Austria in her will. And yet, ownership records show that the artwork was not hers to give because it clearly belonged to Ferdinand Bloch. With the help of the investigative journalist Hubertus Czernin, Altmann was able to prove that Bloch had named her as one of his heirs.²⁴ Thus, what Bloch-Bauer wrote in her will was not legally binding, but rather a mere request that her husband donate the Klimt paintings to the Galerie Belvedere. “The language was framed as a request and was referred to as ‘not binding’ because [Bloch] had paid for the paintings.”²⁵

Bloch was unable to fulfill his wife’s request because he was forced to flee Vienna in 1939 and passed away six years later. He died impoverished in Switzerland, but not before scripting a will of his own. The existence of the will was revealed in a series of investigative articles published in the Austrian press.²⁶ In it, Ferdinand left his entire estate, including Klimt’s portraits, to his nephews and nieces. Altmann, Ferdinand’s niece, was thus included among the heirs in his will.²⁷

Even after the revelations of these investigative articles, the Austrian restitution panel rejected Altmann’s claim to the paintings. This restitution case could never have come to fruition without the help of Altmann’s young, thirty-two-year-old lawyer named E. Randol Schoenberg. Fittingly, Schoenberg was also of Austrian heritage. He was the grandson of Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg and extremely passionate about his family’s history. He was exposed to this case because his mother was a good friend of Maria Altmann. Throughout the legal battle for the restitution of the Klimt paintings, Altmann was advised to seek a more experienced lawyer. At the time of this case, Schoenberg was still very young, newly married, and had recently become a father.²⁸ Soon after taking Altmann’s case, Schoenberg—who was employed at a Californian law firm at the time—gave up his steady job so that he could devote his time to Altmann’s case.²⁹ Schoenberg took a big risk and worked tirelessly for eight years on a case that many believed to be futile.³⁰

Many believed Altmann and Schoenberg would not prevail in their journey to restitution when the case went to the United States Supreme Court. Their chances looked bleak, especially when President George W. Bush’s administration sided with the Austrian government, claiming Altmann could not sue Austria in the United States.³¹ Despite the fact that the odds were against them, the duo prevailed indeed. In 2006, eight years into Altmann’s fight for the restitution of her family’s paintings, the United States Supreme Court finally cleared the way for her to sue the Austrian government.³² However, Austria delayed and delayed bringing the case to trial; Altmann believed this was intentional, as she “feared that the Austrian government was just waiting for her to die.”³³ As a result, rather than waiting for a trial eventually to begin and then
enduring a drawn-out, time-consuming, and costly court battle, the parties reached a binding settlement. Within this settlement, it was decided that five of the six paintings that had been plundered from Altmann’s family would be returned to her.³⁴

Altmann and Schoenberg’s success came as a shock to the art and legal worlds. When Altmann won back the paintings, her advisors had aggressively pressured her to create competition between auction houses in order to get the best possible deal. Despite their advice, Altmann was not interested. She sold her newly-acquired Klimt paintings at Christie’s auction house in November 2006. Her primary goal in pursuing the restitution of her family’s stolen artwork had never been financial. Altmann simply wanted justice for her family. This is evident in the fact that Altmann donated the majority of the proceeds — one-hundred-ninety-two million dollars — to relatives and to many charities.³⁵ The proceeds from the sales were used in part to establish the Maria Altmann Family Foundation, which supports the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust along with other philanthropic institutions.³⁶ As Altmann’s lawyer, Schoenberg became a very rich man because of the sales of the Klimt paintings.

The Woman in Gold Today

Altmann chose to sell her paintings through Christie’s auction house because she trusted Stephen Lash, the Chairman Emeritus of Christie’s, who had remained at her side throughout her legal battle against the Austrian government.³⁷ Once Altmann had reclaimed and gained possession of her paintings, Lash introduced her to Ronald Lauder, an art collector, gallery owner, and heir to the Estée Lauder fortune. Shortly after, Lauder purchased the 1907 The Woman in Gold at Christie’s for one-hundred-thirty-five million dollars to hang in his Neue Gallerie in the Upper East Side of New York City. The painting remains on view for the public in the museum to this day. At the time of the auction, the selling price for the painting was the highest that had ever been paid for an artwork at auction.

To little surprise, Altmann’s choice to sell her newly restituted paintings at auction resulted in a strong response from the public. Many criticized Altmann and her four fellow heirs for “falling prey to the temptations of the art market.”³⁸ Others saw the value in the attention the case brought to issues of ownership and repatriation.

Conclusion

The story of Klimt’s Woman in Gold is unique in its success, but not in its tragedy. Rather than symbolizing Austrian nationalism, we should remember the Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer as a symbol of all that the Altmann family lost as well as of the material and physical losses of countless families that resulted from Nazi plundering. While we will never fully recover from the tragic displacement of art and cultural property that took place during World War II, what we can do is educate ourselves on the damage that was done, honor those whose lives and welfare were taken from them, and address the displacement of art that largely still exists today.

The unfortunate fact remains that restitution tends to be more of an exception than a rule. Austria was not alone in failing to return Nazi-plundered art after World War II. In France, for example, fewer than one hundred out of the two-thousand unclaimed looted artworks hanging in museums today have been returned. Furthermore, the majority of attempts to recover art result in failure, and the few successful claims tend to be backed by a lot of money, clear and detailed records, and a lot of luck.³⁹ Why does all of this matter? The fact of the matter is that we need to do more to repatriate any art that was wrongly stolen during World War II or across time and place. In the meantime, we can use cases like that of Maria Altmann to inspire others. Despite the rarity of Altmann’s success story, publicizing that rare success is still extremely important. Schoenberg stated in a New York Times interview that, “Each time there’s a success, it gives people more hope, and that allows the restitution efforts to continue.”⁴⁰ Success breeds hope. Every time another case succeeds, it pushes and motivates others not to give up in their own fights. It also places pressure on countries and global communities to establish new mechanisms for seeking out provenance, recovering pieces, and returning them to their rightful owners. One successful case will spark another. And another.

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A Touch of Grace: Keith Haring’s Grace House Mural and the Performance of Place-Making

Chase Pendleton | University of California, Berkeley

During the spring of 2016, in a building commonly known as Grace House, tenants at 218 West 108th Street on Manhattan’s Upper West Side received an eviction notice in the form of a letter. The Church of the Ascension, which had owned the building for over a century, had made the difficult decision to sell the property in order to raise the money necessary to remain open. In a time of great uncertainty and with the threat of displacement looming overhead, many were prompted to reflect on the building’s history — a narrative that happens to include Keith Haring. Compared to some of Haring’s other murals, the artist’s work in Grace House, created between 1983 and 1984, is fairly simple, consisting of thirteen figures rendered entirely in thick, black lines on off-white cement. For decades the work sat more or less undisturbed — until the eviction notice came.

A short time after the eviction notice, the Grace House Mural was excavated from 218 West 108th Street and sold at auction. Jeff Greene, chairman and founder of EverGreene, the architectural company that oversaw the project, said that the mural went “from being a wall to being almost these sculptural artifacts that have their own kind of intrinsic artistic quality.”¹ Exhibited in 2021 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Grace House Mural was made available to the public in a new way. What might Haring’s work have to say for a COVID-era America? What makes Grace House Mural meaningful? Although it is not one of Haring’s best-known or most celebrated works, Grace House Mural represents a critical point in Haring’s early career and speaks to a larger ethos of resilience, preservation, and access.

To understand the significance of Grace House Mural, we must begin by situating it in its original context. Located between Broadway and Amsterdam, Grace House was a fairly unremarkable five-story brownstone. According to Stav Ziv in Newsweek, from 1977 until the first decade of the 2000s, the building was rented by the Catholic Youth Organization “for retreats and other programs for kids.”² Some, like Benny Soto and David Almodovar, both lived and volunteered at the center. Kinah Ro-
sas, a former director for Grace House, who was a teenager when Haring painted the mural, told a local reporter in 1986 that the center provided valuable youth services like conflict resolution and public speaking that “kept a lot of kids off the streets.” The Grace House youths traversed the city — dancing in clubs, eating at diners, and contributing to a rich and complicated network that precluded Haring’s intervention. It was this same web of social, physical, and geographical relationships that led Haring to Grace House in the first place. According to wall text from the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Soto and Almodovar had “previously befriended Haring at Paradise Garage, a downtown dance club where Haring and a coterie of artists, writers, musicians, and performers frequently congregated.” It was supposedly there, in a crowded Manhattan nightclub, that Haring was asked to create something for Grace House.

Many scholars, including Natalie E. Phillips and David Galloway, have written on Haring’s early engagement with the Jesus Movement and the lingering presence of religious imagery in his work. Phillips wrote that the artist’s contact with the movement was unsurprising considering the large number of evangelist communes and coffeehouses in Haring’s hometown of Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Phillips goes on to say that “Haring maintained an interest in religion throughout his years in New York of club hopping and promiscuity, never forgetting his youthful experiences at church and with the Jesus People.” One might go on to read Grace House Mural as a synthesis between the two worlds — a link between Haring’s youth and his fame. Instead of contrasting Haring’s early religious enthusiasm with the sexual energy and “promiscuity” of his later years, as Phillips does, we should instead appreciate ways in which the two spheres were connected. Ivan L. Munuera refers to a shared belief between New York City club promoters Ian Schrager and Steve Rubell that “disco music constructed a certain atmosphere, or scenography, a stage for a new community that would re-form every night on the dance floor.” The idea of a unified yet continually re-forming community is precisely the message that Haring brought to Grace House.

Galloway notes that “though not a practicing Christian in the last years of his life, [Haring] had a profound sense of right and wrong, of good and evil, and he devoted a considerable part of his energy to social causes.” Many of these causes involved working with children, making Grace House an ideal location for Haring, who later said, “I would love to be a teacher because I love children and I think that not enough people...understand how important they are. I have done many projects with children of all ages. My fondest memories are of these experiences.” It is tempting to consider the creation of Grace House Mural as one of those memories — painted in front of an audience of children in a building that served the community’s youth.

The mural began in the lobby with Haring’s Radiant Baby, an image that, in the early 1980s, was already a globally recognized symbol. On the adjacent wall, between the mailboxes and the radiator cover, another figure waves at the viewer. This second body’s head is the bronze plaque that commemorates the building’s founder, Joseph P. Grace. Given that Haring’s Radiant Baby also served as a do-signature for the artist, we can appreciate the lobby as a space where Haring’s name becomes linked to Grace House; the presence of the tag alongside a personification of Grace House in the waving figure places the two entities on an equal plane.

On the first flight of stairs four bodies kick, jump, and dance in a burst of energy that feels appropriate for a youth center and echoes the rhythmic, writhing forms in a dance club. The lineup culminates with two figures embracing — a duo that illustrates beautifully Haring’s attention to the building. The figure on the right, on the small set of stairs between the landing and the second floor, is positioned slightly above its companion, who is squarely on the landing below. The bodies in Haring’s mural do not so much adorn the wall as occupy real space in the building, interacting with the architecture and moving with the staircase. Soto, reflecting on the mural with Newsweek magazine, said that “[t]here’s certainly a lot of joy in the figures as you go up and down the steps. In an ultra-simplistic way, he captured it: That’s what Grace House felt like. There were always kids running up and down the steps.” While joy and exuberance are frequently discussed aspects of Haring’s work, so too are pain and destruction. Art historian Ralph Melcher wrote that Haring’s work is defined by “sudden changes from positive to negative, [and] the permanent presence, at least subliminally, of the remote, threatening and destructive elements in the grotesque and the playful.” Grace House, despite its location and intended audience, is no exception.

The second flight of stairs begins with a figure I call “the Falling Man.” Somewhere between comic and tragic, this form reminds us that Haring’s bodies are vulnerable. The Falling Man also serves to mark the second flight of stairs as stranger and more unpredictable than the first. Alongside all-too-human fragility, there is a celebration of variety and the body’s capacity for change: a figure with two heads and a hole in its chest, a breakdancer who defies gravity, and a figure with an elongated, loop-de-loop torso. On the landing is a form that is part human and part barking dog, the perfect hybrid to greet viewers at the top of the stairs. These semi-human figures border on the monstrous while still retaining the playfulness of Haring’s line. The thirteenth and final figure is cut off mid-torso as it dives into the nearest door. Despite the frequently-cited anecdote that the form represents Gary Lyon, Grace House’s director at the time of Haring’s intervention, I refer to this image as “the Fleeing Figure.”

There is a continuity in Haring’s work that is instantly recognizable and deceptive familiar. Although Grace House Mural is populated by some of Haring’s most iconic figures — an assemblage that Nancy Coleman in the New York Times described as “quintessential Haring” — we should be wary of such familiarity. It is undisputed that Haring repeated figures and spent a considerable amount of time developing and perfecting his own visual language. As Melcher writes, “Haring constantly reused particular signs and symbols, which did not relate to any notation, within an established context and with a meaning which the signs would not have had before and outside the picture system.” Following this logic, we should consider Haring’s artworks as providing their own established contexts and meanings that are distinct from other symbolic systems including those in his other works.

Consider also Ulrike Gehring’s statement that “[Haring’s] pictorial signs are modules whose meaning changes according to their configuration, with every change referring...
back to an earlier change.¹⁴ Both Melcher and Gehring encourage their readers to approach Haring’s works as unique arrangements of recognizable forms with meaning that relate or respond in some way to their individual socio-political and spatial contexts while still contributing to larger narratives beyond said contexts. Keeping in mind that this study refers exclusively to Haring’s mural painting or public arts projects, we should appreciate that each artwork is a small part of a much larger conversation that involves multiple overlapping communities. Birgit Bauridl, an urbanist from Universität Regensberg, reminds us that a single mural is “only a detail of the urban space and of the complete web of murals that literally map the city.”¹⁵ All of these scholars begin a conversation on how space influences and is reflected in Haring’s art, contributing to both an artwork’s efficacy and specificity.

Take, for example, a 1987 mural Haring created at the City of New York Parks and Recreation public swimming pool in Greenwich Village. Frequently referred to as the Carmine Street Mural, the 170-foot long work features swimmers, dolphins, mermaids, and fish against a white background broken up with elongated blobs of yellow and blue. The New York City Parks’ website notes that Haring took inspiration from “the hues of the pool’s underwater surfacing,” a decision that reflects his interest in creating works that were not just site-specific but spatially aware.¹⁶ The overall effect, with line and color working independently of one another and meeting at the surface of the mural a rippling effect.

Carmine Street Mural is significant to this discussion because it shares a similar audience with Grace House Mural. Ricardo Mon-teez describes the Parks’ mural as a “cheery aquatic-themed scene...appropriate use of line for the Carmine Street public swimming pool. On a hot summer day, the pool is filled with children.”²⁷ While it seems obvious that a mural at a public pool would use aquatic imagery, Carmine Street Mural is not as simple as one might expect, beginning with the central figure of a flexing King Neptune, who wears a five-pointed crown that looks somewhat like a city skyline. His left arm ends with the head of a dolphin; on the right hand, the index finger and the pinkie extend outward, while the thumb holds down the middle and ring finger, a sign of the Devil. Like Haring’s other works this mural is brimming with movement, action, and ambiguity — there is joy (a dolphin jumping through a hoop to the left of center) alongside danger (the figure being eaten by a fish on the right). With irregularly long limbs or webbed hands and feet, the humans and non-humans of Haring’s mural act out change in an evolutionary way. The figure on the far left of the work has an extremely long left leg that extends backward and forms two loops; a swimmer nearby has a strange, hook-like arm that reaches out after a fish. On the other end of the work, a mermaid with webbed hands appears to look down at its swollen abdomen, while a standing figure puts its arm around a dolphin with legs. One could say that, in addition to innocent themes of swimming and aquatic play, there is a more meaningful message in Carmine Street Mural about development and the pain or discomfort that accompanies growth.

There is also a mural Haring created in 1983 for the Haggerty Museum students from the Fine Arts Program. These are construction materials, reflecting the incomplete or in-process status of the museum at the time of the commission. Haring’s use of color in Construction Fence also points to the work’s spatial awareness. Curtis L. Carter, founding director for the Haggerty Museum, remembers taking Haring to “a specialty paint store on Milwaukee’s south side” to buy bright orange Day-Glo paint.²⁸ The bright orange conjures images of safety gear and construction work, the identification of hazards and “forbidden” space; it is a color that refers back to the construction site that a fence — or a mural — serves to conceal.

The Marquette mural is important to this study for two reasons: first, it was created around the same time as Grace House Mural and therefore helps us to position Haring as an artist in that moment. Carter wrote that “[t]he Marquette mural differs from his later public works in that, like the subway murals, expresses the spontaneous energy of actual street graffiti. In this respect, its simple yet poignant images represent Haring at his best.”²⁹ Second, like Grace House Mural, the Marquette mural is composed of individual panels. This similarity offers an opportunity to consider the complexities of a mural that can be broken down into parts and re-assembled in various locations.

Having thus established that Haring’s murals are works that are deeply informed by or responsive to their locations and that each individual work, in turn, contributes to a larger “map,” we must now address Grace House Mural in its current state. Since the thirteen individual panels thankfully remain as a single collection, we may continue to refer to the Mural as a cohesive work of art. It is undeniable, however, that Grace House Mural as Haring originally created it no longer exists. All of Haring’s figures have achieved a new level of individuality and are transformed into movable signs. The strange shapes of the panels give them a unique sculptural character, possessing what Greene, the mural’s excavator, accurately identified as an “intrinsically artistic quality.” In their new installation in Denver, Haring’s figures can communicate with one another in new ways, opening up readings that would otherwise be unattainable.

Inevitably, despite their new location, each of the panels refers back to Grace House. Ephemeral traces such as the mailboxs, signs that indicate the location of a fire extinguisher, and the ghostly gaps where light switches once hung all remind the viewer that these are fragments of a lived space. The unusual, slightly awkward shapes only underscore the fact that the figures were designed with that space in mind. Taken out of its original context, the Falling Man may be interpreted in similar ways or come to embody new and unforeseeable associations. The exhibition of Grace House Mural at the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, curated by Nora Burnett Abrams, groups the Falling Man with six other figures under the category of “Performance.” It is performance that makes Grace House Mural significant for modern audiences — its “intrinsically artistic quality” comes in part from Haring’s iconic figures but equally from the conscious and unconscious — reconstruction of Grace House itself.

As Yi-Fu Tuan writes in Topophilia, “awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place.”²⁰ I have attempted
to show how such an awareness is critical in understanding Haring’s public works of art. In Grace House Mural, performance and awareness come together in a way that give viewers the opportunity to “re-create” Grace House. This process also involves reconstructing and navigating the various relationships and communities that brought Grace House Mural into being. It is an exercise that touches on the general, such as Haring’s love of children, as well as the specific influences that Grace House had on the community.

Looking forward, what I am proposing here for Grace House Mural in light of the COVID-19 pandemic is a reconsideration of Pierre Voges’ theory of “dynamic place making” — what art historian Naomi Roux defines as “a euphemism for drawing investment into public space and producing economic transformation for the city as a whole.” Grace House Mural allows us to begin this project by asking viewers to re-invest continually in metaphysical space. Dynamic place-making begins by “re-building” Grace House and carrying on its legacy. Roux acknowledges that “[t]he idea of public art as a driver of urban regeneration or social cohesion is a longstanding one.” This sentiment applies to Grace House Mural, both before and after its excavation from 218 West 108th Street. Even in its dislocated state, it is an artwork with immense communicative and social import.

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Notes
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19. Ibid., 14.
22. Ibid., 155.
Entering the arts is a choice of passion. While a select few make comfortable salaries, the majority decide between fulfilling work or rent and loan payments. Those dedicating their lives to the arts often have investments and generational wealth or supplement their income with additional jobs. Many museum workers entered 2020 in the latter situation, with precarious financial circumstances. COVID-19’s layoffs, furloughs, and canceled programming exacerbated the situation for many of these low paid and predominantly BIPOC front-of-house and part-time staff. With minimal institutional or government support, affected workers turned to GoFundMe, family, and mutual-aid funds. Despite the resourcefulness of museum workers, it is disconcerting how easily and rapidly this community of cultural workers is placed in peril. These structural problems call for reform, no matter the recovery of the industry. The collective project, Museum As Site for Social Action (MASS Action) states: “We are at a critical crossroads as an institution, as a nation, as global citizens, to rebuild. The notion that we will not be able to realize the impending reality of their situations. While some senior staff took pay cuts to delay layoffs, most spaces inevitably sacrificed “non-core” part-time and entry positions in hopes of self-preservation. Full-time and leadership positions were lost; however, the chief losses were to this vulnerable non-core faction of employees. The partition drawn between indispensable and non-core staff, who often include part-time, education, maintenance, and community-facing positions, had the effect of casting off many institutions’ most racially diverse workers. A 2018 panel comparison of one-hundred-and-thirty-six Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Ithaka S+R found minuscule gains for racial diversity within an overwhelmingly white industry. Non-Hispanic Caucasians, hereafter referred to as white, made up seventy-two percent of interviewed museum staff, down from seventy-six percent in 2014, despite constituting sixty percent of the population. Some COVID recovery plans, under the aegis of principally white leadership, have targeted this small glimmer of progress. In leadership positions, white people hold eighty percent of existing positions and were eighty-eight percent of new hires. These trends demonstrate a desire to maintain the white hegemony at all museum staff levels and deprive individuals of a fair share of opportunities even at entry-level positions. Recipients of the Museum Workers Relief Fund, initiated during the pandemic, responded in their exit survey as forty-four percent white and fifty-six percent BIPOC, and the majority had fewer than five years of experience. This survey does not encompass all those facing financial strain but highlights the disproportionate outcome of employment decisions. As with the virus itself, so many of the victims of these decisions are the select BIPOC and lower-income workers who support daily operations and pioneer programming. While COVID was called an equal opportunity disease, not everyone is equally vulnerable. Living in a shelter versus a house you own, weighing the luxury of Uber Eats against the bitter cold lines of food pantries, and having the ability to shift one’s work online and indoors are consequences of unequal and predatory capitalist systems that leave the most vulnerable groups bearing the brunt of the pandemic. Members of Native communities, an already small demographic, are three- and-a-half times more likely to test positive for COVID and are hospitalized at five times the rate of non-Hispanic whites. Journalist and organizer Johnnie Jae has conveyed the gravity of the situation as she shares personal stories of sickness, passing, and recovery on the Disability Visibility podcast. Already suscep- tible to discriminatory business and medical practices, COVID’s disproportionate effect on our BIPOC communities and continuing hate crimes against Asian Americans make it clear who engineered the system and the intended bodies it supports.

Some hide from fear, others are forced on the frontlines to afford necessities, while a select group profits. Harvard political science professor Theda Skocpol highlights how those in the highest income brackets, who possess property, stocks, generational wealth, and other resilient stores of value, can wait out the worst of the financial calamity, widening the gap as those revenue streams accrue value over time. The poor do not have the privilege of waiting. Households with low savings (the threshold cited by the Chicago Booth Review was three thousand dollars) spent more of their stimulus checks than their high-savings counterparts. In the most extreme cases, those with less than five hundred dollars in savings, depleted the funds in fewer than ten days. Those in privileged positions are poised to end this year still prosperous, if not better than before. Spawned from a 2017 Twitter exchange between La Tanya Autry and Mike Murawski, the “Museums are Not Neutral” movement has spearheaded many of these discussions around how “museums are products and projects of colonialism.” This lens pushes its audience to address the disparities evident in the industry with the racist, classist, and ableist mindset that surrounds it. There is a reason most institutional figureheads are white, well-off, and/or come from privilege. The existing mentality constrains who is able and willing to enter the arts industry, what roles candidates receive, and how hiring practices further segment who progresses up the ladder. The recent convergence of financial strain, powerless employees, and disconnected leadership accelerated and magnified the forces already pressing down...
on the hard-working and supposedly non-core employees.

The callous treatment of employees by those in power was a concern from the beginning. When the question of layoffs arose last summer, workers and art historians collected thousands of petition signatures to advocate for this vulnerable and critical community. The authors and undersigned of these petitions argue that the “museum cannot function without security guards, educators, maintenance workers, and visitor services staff,” and “to eliminate these positions while retaining only senior management lays waste to vital forms of institutional memory, and decimates any gains made in the name of diversity and representation.” These pleas to arts leaders for compassion have had little success. As of February 2021, the open collective Museum Workers Speak lists over eight-thousand layoffs, nearly ten-thousand furloughs, two-and-a-half-thousand hour-reductions, and hundreds of vacancies. A spreadsheet populated with anonymized entries from various museum workers, while not encompassing all the work lost, demonstrates that most of the pandemic losses originate from the most vulnerable and critical community to sustain themselves when the institution does not love us and its leaders respond callously to their workers’ job loss. This highlights the soullessness of the museum workers, while not encompassing all the work lost, demonstrates that most of the pandemic losses originate from the most vulnerable and critical community. The callous treatment of employees by those in power was a concern from the beginning. When the question of layoffs arose last summer, workers and art historians collected thousands of petition signatures to advocate for this vulnerable and critical community. The authors and undersigned of these petitions argue that the “museum cannot function without security guards, educators, maintenance workers, and visitor services staff,” and “to eliminate these positions while retaining only senior management lays waste to vital forms of institutional memory, and decimates any gains made in the name of diversity and representation.” These pleas to arts leaders for compassion have had little success. As of February 2021, the open collective Museum Workers Speak lists over eight-thousand layoffs, nearly ten-thousand furloughs, two-and-a-half-thousand hour-reductions, and hundreds of vacancies. A spreadsheet populated with anonymized entries from various museum workers, while not encompassing all the work lost, demonstrates that most of the pandemic losses originate from the most vulnerable and critical community.

TheTenement Museum Union and Brooklyn Museum mutual-aid organizers echo this stance on mutual-aid as a solution to mercenary forms of institutional memory, and decimates any gains made in the name of diversity and representation.20

While museums cast their workers away, there were a lacking number of support networks to catch them. Access to the first round of government stimulus, after a long delay, was hidden behind numerous bureaucratic hurdles, excluding many vulnerable populations, including the undocumented and houseless. The second smaller round of stimulus reduced some of these obstacles but is still far from a livable wage. The financial schism is evident in how workers fighting for their jobs—with out which, they face foreclosure or starvation—pleaded with their mid-six- and seven-figure directors. Driven by necessity and a system ill-equipped to support them, workers looked to their peers and created community-driven resources.

Communities collaborating to survive turmoil have been historic occurrences. Black communities started with mutual-aid funds early on, but those support networks achieve their recognizable form only after the Civil War. Free African Society, founded in 1778 Philadelphia, was itself a mutual-aid society designed to provide socio-economic guidance to newly freed people. Without resources and a strong distrust for existing financial structures, members of this community relied on these self-directed financial institutions. Mutual-aid, as a tool opposite capitalism, assists Black and other disenfranchised communities to sustain themselves when the structures at large are not built with them in mind. The union of necessity and structural mistreatment drove the Black community to create these alternate pathways towards economic stability, a sentiment eerily similar to the message of Museum Workers Speak.

Founded in 2015 from a “rogue session” at the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) conference, Museum Workers Speak is a collective of current and former museum employees advocating for change, accountability, and respect for everyone, regardless of their placement in the institution. The collective’s website opens decisively with: “it has become clear to us that when our institution will not stand in solidarity with us, we must stand in solidarity with one another.” In a formal statement elsewhere on its website, Museum Workers Speak continues: “We learned long ago that the institution does not love us and that museums do not have our backs. But as museum workers, we can lean on one another for support and solidarity.” Take the situation of two people losing their jobs: mutual-aid would recognize that identical forces may lead to different outcomes and one of these individuals may still be capable of assisting the other. Mutual-aid recognizes this nuance and works to build camaraderie within intersectionality. The Tenement Museum Union and Brooklyn Museum mutual-aid organizers echo this stance on mutual-aid as a solution to merciless structural inequities within the museum world.

After museums and the government showed their indifference and their inability to protect the vulnerable, workers turned to each other for support. Museum Workers Speak created the aforementioned Relief Fund, a fund “by and for museum workers, founded on equity, trust, solidarity, and empowerment,” in the legacy of preceding mutual-aid societies. Now sitting at over one-hundred-thousand dollars, the fund provides relief to a hemorrhaging art world. The Tenement Museum Union’s fundraising attempt has raised thirty-five-thousand dollars, while MOCA Union’s sits at twenty. Meanwhile, more labor forces have created their own systems. Although each organization has its own variation, most of these museum-worker-operated mutual-aids ask former and current employees, family, friends, and even those who simply believe in the arts (and have the means to do so) to help. These contributions are distributed to applicants either in pre-determined sums or via an individual need-aware system. The latter system brings applicants, supporters, and dispersal committees into close proximity and dialogue, removing the traditional one-way image of support. Financial onus and strife, alongside the conversational nature of the relationship, solidify the communal identity and its bounds. By this same force, the well-off and still-employed museum elites, who pushed former or underemployed workers into these circumstances, are often uninvolunted in searching for aid for them and often view themselves as separate from this group. A few donations here and there by museum leaders does not disprove this apathy and instead strengthens these leaders’ view of this struggling group as a charitable cause and unfortunate consequence, rather than a reality they and the system built. At any moment, institutional leaders could have taken a pay freeze or paid workers a livable wage before the pandemic, but many chose not to. Their priority was always minimizing loss to preserve the collection rather than the dozens, if not hundreds, of humans who trusted them and devoted themselves to the work. In an industry that so congratulates for progressive ideas, many museum leaders responded callously to their workers’ job loss. This highlights the soullessness of the words they use to sound “right” on social issues and thus the hypocrisy of their actions.

Despite the AAM’s lack of acknowledgment or support for these grassroots funds to
assist workers, some museums have turned to layoffs, asking for their generosity. The Tenement Museum, for instance, collected five hundred thousand for internal use, although its fundraising could not save its workers. A spokesperson from Art and Museum Transparency, an art workers collective, is justified in the group’s anger when saying: “it’s shameful that museum workers, need to dig into their own pockets to help those laid off,” while the top-earning leaders are unaffected and do not fundraise to keep their workers. Additional advice to “avoid competing with the museum’s own fundraising efforts” makes explicit that the goals of the museum and workers’ self-preservation are two distinct projects.

As re-openings commence, we must ask ourselves what reform should be instituted to address the scars these layoffs have left. Whether a conscious or unconscious choice, the structures of museums have left their workers in disarray. These vulnerabilities existed before COVID and will persist without intentional and directed interventions. The pandemic is our opportunity to sharpen our awareness and responsiveness to these underlying issues and to recommit “to improve our social systems to better support society’s most vulnerable not just during this crisis, but after it passes.”

Collaborative leadership has historically “focused on collaboration between director and staff, and perhaps with the board,” critically excluding the workers and those the museum serves. With few BIPOC-directed institutions and the lack of understanding inherent in deficient representation, a wide breadth of experiences and perspectives are excluded. In several circumstances, leaders’ decisions were thrust upon workers, even before they could fully process the year’s life-changing events. There was a lack of transparency and clear communication across the various tiers of museum leadership. Equity is, after all, about the existence of choice. While traditional systems have decisions set from a top-down approach, a truly equitable system includes all parties in the process.

When the world presents us with variable circumstances, options must be provided with outcome parity in mind rather than with blanket treatments. Thus, the highest-paid staff should be the first to take cuts and subsequent reductions, graduated by wealth and resource availability. The Oakland Museum of California recently committed to this system as it reduced hours for one-hundred-and-six full-time staff to preserve the positions of forty-four part-time workers. In making small sacrifices as a community, they preserved more jobs and livelihoods. Big Door Brigade, a collective with the “desire to see increased participation in left social movements and [more time spent] talking about how to remove barriers to participation,” similarly identifies transparency, accessibility, intentional listening, dignity, and self-determination of people in need of crisis as pillars to create a “radical redistribution” of resources. Mutual-aid organizing and collective leadership provides a model for how to confront the various ways colonialism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and patriarchy infuse themselves into seemingly innocuous choices, a model for strategy and community that institution leaders should adopt.

While it is systems of oppression that create poverty and vulnerability, people perpetuate and sustain these machines. Many have made it through the year. Seeing some survivors does not mean that the extant system is acceptable. Resiliency means that there was some force with which to contend, and, when that force is internal and self-replicating, we are called upon to act. These movements are guided by grassroots and predominately BIPOC leaders. It is time for them to be invited in as collaborators and for leaders of art institutions to listen, striving together to better the situation for all those workers who entrusted them with their livelihood. We need to practice and promulgate desire to see increased participation in left social movements and [more time spent] talking about how to remove barriers to participation,” similarly identifies transparency, accessibility, intentional listening, dignity, and self-determination of people in need of crisis as pillars to create a “radical redistribution” of resources. Mutual-aid organizing and collective leadership provides a model for how to confront the various ways colonialism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and patriarchy infuse themselves into seemingly innocuous choices, a model for strategy and community that institution leaders should adopt.

As empathy means relating to the experiences of others, whereas sympathy is recognizing the feeling (sensation) of the event, this aspiration toward true equity is achievable only by bringing in the appropriate lived experiences.

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Notes


8. NAEA Museum Education, “Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis.”


13. MASS Action, "Equitable Institutional Sustainability in Times of Crisis;"


18. NYC Art Workers, "Open Letter Calling on Museums to Retain Staff During COVID-19 Crisis;"


20. NYC Art Workers, "Open Letter Calling on Museums to Retain Staff During COVID-19 Crisis;" "Arts+All Museums Salary Transparency 2019;"


23. NAEA Museum Education, "Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis;"


29. NAEA Museum Education, "Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis;"

30. MASS Action, "Equitable Institutional Sustainability in Times of Crisis;"


33. Araabi, "Lessons from Mutual Aid;"

34. NAEA Museum Education, "Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis;"

35. NAEA Museum Education, "Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis;"

36. MASS Action, "Equitable Institutional Sustainability in Times of Crisis;"


39. NAEA Museum Education, "Mutual Aid and Organizing for Museum Workers in Crisis;"

40. MASS Action, "Equitable Institutional Sustainability in Times of Crisis;"
Colectividad y Cólera:
Tracing a Visual Language of Protest As Seen Through Comparative Analysis of the Escuela de Cultura Popular Martíres del 68 and the 1968 Student Movement

Isabel Ruiz Cano | Smith College

Introduction

Che Guevara was executed in 1967, months before the student movement erupted in Mexico City. After the widespread publication of Alberto Korda Díaz’s portrait of Guevara in 1967, his image appeared in marches and protests from May’s 1968 student and worker demonstrations in Paris to similar events in Mexico City that same year. For example, one of the images of Che that surged in 1968 came from the computer at the Centro de Organización y Fomento de Actividades Académicas at the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico City (Fig. 1). This pointillistic reproduction of Korda Díaz’s portrait uses computer glyphs and code to “print” Guevara’s face onto a 28 x 36.8 centimeter sheet of paper. As Antigoni Memou asserts:

[Guevara’s] young face, his long hair, the beard, the beret with the star and his aggressive gaze embodied the romanticism of his ideas and...the fight against exploitation, imperialism and capitalism, his vision for a new man, his fight in solidarity with the Third World and his militancy and anti-capitalist struggle was appealing to the revolutionary youth in Western capitalist societies.¹

With the reproduction of this portrait, the students at the National Polytechnic Institute printed a call for international solidarity. Their appropriation of cutting-edge technology for its reproduction proves extremely significant, as it ties their movement to mid-century aspirations of modernization, reclaiming technology as a tool for change. Their portrait of Guevara functioned within a larger collection of ephemera that captured their movement’s revolutionary and critical spirit, serving to imagine an alternative to the years of repression under Mexico’s single-party state. It toyed with the tense temporalities at play during the mid-century moment, wherein rapidly changing technologies promised liberating modernity for a nation whose government seemed intent to remain socially stagnant, promising progress but never actually delivering.

Fig. 1 Centro de Organización y fomento de Actividades Académicas del IPN, Che Guevara, 1968 (Mexico City, Mexico).
Through strikes, protests, and propaganda, those involved in the 1968 student movement demanded that the Mexican government cease military and police intervention in academic spaces, free political prisoners, distribute reparations for those affected in confrontations, and, most importantly, engage in an open, public dialogue between government officials and leaders of the student movement. This dialogue proved especially pertinent in the immediate wake of the 1968 Olympics, where-in the Mexican government hired U.S.-born designer Lance Wyman to create a totalizing, cohesive visual identity that presented Mexico as a modern nation worthy of participating on the international stage. Those involved in the 1968 uprising viewed these efforts as a masking of the true Mexico, a nation where violence abounded and freedom of expression was restricted.

On October 2nd, the Mexican army opened fire on the largest student protest yet of that critical year, as crowds congregated in the central Plaza de las Tres Culturas, commonly known as “Tlatelolco.” The Tlatelolco massacre represents the apex of political subjugation at the hands of a repressive government. Its cruelty is permanently etched in Mexico’s collective memory, proving the power of aesthetics in imbuing the Escuela’s images with a powerful saliency, proving the power of aesthetics in constructing narratives for those affected in confrontations, and, most importantly, engaging in open, public dialogue between government officials and leaders of the student movement. This historical connection-between 1968 and the twenty-first century—puts the Escuela within a larger legacy of aesthetic appropriation, mass reproduction, and articulation of dissent. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions for the development of artistic practice as a tool for political and social change. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions as a tool for political and social change. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions for the development of artistic practice as a tool for political and social change. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions as a tool for political and social change. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions as a tool for political and social change. The Escuela actively distributes its artistic productions as a tool for political and social change.

For the students making the visual propaganda that accompanied their uprising in 1968, quick reproduction methods proved instrumental. In their efforts to support the uprising, art students created an ephemeral collection consisting of stencil mimeographs, screenprint and linocut posters, and news bulletins. Rebeca Hidalgo, part of the Student Graphics Workshop during 1968, reflects on this “technical revolution,” elaborating how:

[Art students] weren’t going to paint using templates or do oils or sculptures in plast- or anything like that, there was no way it would work or circulate fast enough...It was only possible using multiple reproduction systems. This brought about a big change in [their] concept of art, which was about painting, sculpture.

In his chronicle of 1968, Paco Ignacio Taibo remembers “Eligio Calderón and Adriana Corona eternally cooped up in the printing room, with a couple of well-oiled, precise mimeographs that produced thousands of flyers per hour, rediscovering the Taylorism and supply-chain production of Swiss watch factories.” Through its physical process, the mass reproduction of propaganda became a way for students to connect with the greater workers’ struggle and served as a conveyor of solidarity. And, as Hidalgo elucidates, students revolted actively against a conservative concept of fine art, applying instead their art school knowledge and use of design skills to create movement’s material.

The Mexican government presented a strategically curated modernist façade on the international stage during the 1968 Summer Olympics. In response, those involved in the student movement developed a “Pop” aesthetic that borrowed elements from contemporary visual culture. For example, a paste-up attributed to Miguel Vargas appropriates Olympic iconography. Vargas arranges five funerary wreaths in a composition that inverts the iconic Olympic rings logo and titles it Dueto Olímpico 1968 or 1968 Olympic Mourning (Duel). Through a visual—and phonetic—pun, Vargas references the public mourning of the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco, highlighting the irony of hosting a joyous international event amidst such violence and death. Take, additionally, the set of stencil paste-ups that consists of a three-by-three grid of negative-space “icons”: an open palm, a tank, a boot with spiked soles, a bayonet, a grenade flying over a fence, a police baton, a bomb, a gas mask, and two wrestling arms interleaved in a “C” formation. In their composition and use of negative space, these paste-ups reference Lance Wyman and Eduardo Terrazas’ pictograms that were part of the visual identity of the 1968 Olympics.

The original pictograms were meant to guide international spectators as they navigated the Olympics.0 What would it mean for bystanders to encounter the original and satirized icons side by side? The paste-ups visually parody Mexico City’s 1968 Olympics’ mod internationalist visual identity. Instead of orienting and introducing international spectators to different Olympic events, as the original intended, the paste-ups disorient those who encounter them. The paste-ups reveal the hidden and repressive systems that made the surroundings of the Olympics possible. Just as the pictograms essentialized Olympic programming, the paste-ups expose what members of the movement saw as essential instruments of violence and state repression.

Nearly fifty years later, the Escuela de Cultura Popular Martires del 68 continues to use similar strategies for the ongoing dissemination and articulation of dissent. The Escue-
la’s screenprints follow the technical revolution championed by the students of 1968: as with the mimeograph, screenprinting’s "intensity of color...speed...and the refreshing unpretentiousness of process and product" make it a perfect medium for “phontomachinical appropriation.” Two such screenprints found at the Smith College Museum of Art further elucidate this point.¹²

In Polinizadores de la Destrucción, a bat-like figure flies against a dark red background, dropping grenades that become increasingly larger as they near the bottom edge of the poster. The text in the center of this image denounces these companies as “Pollinators of Destruction,” with the smaller text in the top half of the poster calling for “Systemic Change, Not Climate Change” and “Organization in the Face of Environmental Destruction.”¹³ The insides of the grenades contain the logos of technology companies such as Telcel, Cisco, and Panasonic — indeed, one of the grenades is not needed. To 2010, artists appropriated the iconography of Capitalist depredation, “Global Warming/Privatization.”¹¹ Two such screenprints found at the Smith College Museum of Art further elucidate this point.¹²

In Defendemos los recursos de tod@s de la depredación capitalista, the Escuela re-interprets the figures of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, picturing them as the elements of Capitalist depredation: “Global Warming/ Pollution, Scarcity, Death, and Privatization.” In all-caps text, the top of the poster calls for “DEFEND EVERYONE’S RESOURCES FROM CAPITALIST DEPREDAION.” The four central figures in the composition ride atop skeletal horses, with the leftmost horse wearing a gas mask, its rider outfitted in what we might see today as a Stormtrooper-like getup. Next to the Pollution Horse rides a cy-clops wearing Uncle Sam’s hat with a giant dollar sign, followed by a grinning skeleton and a grim soldier. The horsemen march on a red field of seemingly endless tree stumps, with black factory smokestacks on the horizon. A concerned group of individuals faces the horsemen in the bottom of the poster, their backs turned towards the viewer.

The Escuela’s screenprints make use of bold color, impactful slogans, and referential iconography to denounce the destruction brought on by Disaster Capitalism. In direct counter to 1968’s ethos of refusing fine art institutions and their practices, the Escuela chooses to display its dissent in the very context of fine art galleries and museums, destabilizing through their infiltration. Still, in a strategy similar to the 1968 appropriation of the Pop aesthetic, the Escuela mixes the iconography of late-stage Capitalism — company logos, deforestation, factory fields — with objects of war and apocalyptic images in order to connote a sense of doom in their viewers. Just like with the parody Wyman/Terrazas icons, viewers of these posters can easily identify and build associations between the intense environmental destruction and impending violence (communicated through the bold color schemes and scratchy traces in the screenprints) and their culprits: corporate greed (in the case of the tech companies), neo-imperialism (as referenced through Uncle Sam), and war. The provoking, imposing slogans in these posters call their viewers to action, bringing to mind protest chants of years past. From 1968 to 2010, artists appropriated the iconography of their times and emphasized the importance of quick reproduction methods in order to distribute impactful messages and critique, adapting to their specific display contexts as needed.

“Pop” Interpretations, Popular Struggle: Metonymic Martyrs

Another key component of the development of this visual language of protest is the identification of and with martyr figures related to social movements in 1968 and in the twenty-first century. Especially effective during the 1968 uprising, this practice increased the visibility of student demands and connected them to a wider, global sense of struggle. As the students involved in 1968 continued to organize after the Tlatelolco massacre, they expanded their cause to go beyond the specific demands of their original movement, becoming part of a national narrative of resistance and change. Similarly, the Escuela continues strategically to employ this practice in their work — serving to build legitimacy through explicit historical connections, activating martyrs to inspire insurrection.

In the red portrait of railroad worker and union activist Demetrio Vallejo, one can clearly see the adaptation of and reference to Pop aesthetics. Vallejo’s high-contrast, red linocut portrait elevates him to celebrity status, making him an immediate icon for the indignation students felt at their government’s suppression of collective organizing. Another poster comes to mind: for a 1973 mitín (a manifestation/protest) produced at the Autonomous University of Puebla’s “poster workshop led by Jorge Pérez Vega” of Grupo Miro,¹⁵ which utilizes a bright blue screenprint silhouette of Emiliano Zapata to call for “Land and Liberty.” As they reference one of the most iconic players in the Mexican Revolution, the students question the validity of the ruling party’s claim to be guided by revolutionary values. After nearly half a decade in power, the National Revolutionary Party (PRI) failed to deliver “land and liberty.” The image of Zapata serves as an ironic reminder of such failure, and, as an inspiration for continual action, setting precedent for future weaponizing of historical figures in favor of contemporary social movements.

In a similar manner, the Escuela continues to weaponize the image of Zapata. In the portfolio Zapata Vive, La Gráfica Sigue [Zapata Lives, The Graphics Continue], artists remake the image of Zapata, turning him into a cultural icon relevant for the twenty-first century. One poster redraws Zapata as a social media cartoon avatar, posting a speech as his status message. Another is an overwhelming, cluttered clip-art style collage, stating “The land belongs to those who work it” and “Zapata lives,” while calling for “Land and Liberty” against an orange-yellow ombre gradient background. Zapata’s Jeringa (vaccine) features two shotguns; the guns frame a posterized image of Zapata’s face flanked by two full-bodied portraits (one as a field worker, the other as a soldier) and surrounded by images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, stars, open palms, and men wearing Zapata’s iconic wide-brimmed hat.

In these posters, the portfolio updates Zapata’s image, refashioning him to fit the digital visual culture of the early 2000’s. Through these posters, then, the Escuela embodies an insurgent universality, wherein “revolutionary action coincides with the possibility of opening a ‘distinct chamber of the past,’ in which there is a future encapsulated and a past attempt at liberation to be redeemed.”¹⁶ Even though the real Zapata is long since dead, his revolutionary ideals remain relevant for the Escuela and the social movements it supports.¹⁷ Just as the students of 1968 questioned the legitimacy of
Alliance & Autonomy: Weaponizing Cultural Heritage

Zapata’s call for “Land and Liberty” still resonates one hundred years after it served as a rallying cry for the Mexican Revolution. This original demand denounces an unequal, oligarchical agricultural system that took advantage of its laborers — many of whom were of Indigenous ancestry. As dissent and dissatisfaction with the post-Revolutionary government progressed through the twentieth century, the call for land and liberty took hold once again. For students in 1968, indigeneity formed part of a contested national cultural heritage. In the twenty-first century, the Escuela allies itself with Indigenous environmentalist struggles, but, instead of engaging in a universalizing narrative, it stresses the specificity of their connections.

A (counter) poster from 1968 “advertises” the Olympic Village with a stylized glyph of Huitzilopochtli, outfitting the Aztec sun and war god with a helmet and bayonet. In this poster, its creators demonstrate an acute criticality of the Mexican government’s manipulation of indigenous cultural heritage for the benefit of image-building. After all, Tlatelolco — the site of the culminating massacre — was a former seat of the Aztec empire, the site of important colonial buildings and the home of public housing apartment units (multifamiliares) of the modern regime. In the years leading up to the Olympics, the Mexican government had embarked on a plethora of heritage initiatives, including the construction of the National Museum of Anthropology.²¹ In his review of the events, cultural critic Octavio Paz links the massacre at Tlatelolco to a cycle of colonial violence, writing that “Spanish-speaking Mexicans . . . are the true heirs of the pre-hispanic world’s murderers.”²² Through their reference to Huitzilopochtli, the students align themselves with Paz’s criticism of the exploitative nature and legacy of the single-party state. They highlight the irony of championing a universalizing cultural heritage that glosses over historical and contemporary tensions.

To a similar effect, the Escuela’s body of work references elements of the same cultural heritage: in another poster from the Zapata Vive, La Gráfica Sigue, they outfit a cyan-hued reproduction of Coatlicue — Huitzilopochtli’s earth-mother goddess, her statue a point of pride for the National Museum of Anthropology²³ — with ammunition belts made out of pencils. In its 2018 portfolio Territorio y Libertad, the Escuela collaborates with Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative to define territory as “not only the physical space itself, but . . . mainly a power place . . . always subject to dispute” and call for freedom which “embraces autonomy . . . in opposition to capitalism-driven governments and corporate controls.” Andrea Narno, a member of the Escuela, declares that “our territories and freedom have an ink base.” Throughout the portfolio, artists include posters and images that speak out against border policing and environmental abuse, specifically as it impacts individuals indigenous to the Americas. They portray the individuals in question with dignified, empowered stances, making heavy use of affirmative language such as “the street is ours” and flight-related imagery such as birds, feathers, and butterflies.²⁴

In the posters above, the Escuela demonstrates a sharp awareness of the unequal, debilitating impact capitalism has upon Indigenous communities. Its repeated use of flight-related imagery speaks of a pressing desire for autonomy, “a need to express, represent, and propose alternate ways of existing.”²⁵ Through its bright, colorful, Pop references to Indigenous cultural heritage — in the case of the Huitzilopochtli poster, for example, and throughout the Territorio y Libertad portfolio — the Escuela builds upon a sense of pride and empowerment. As reflected in the quotations included in the portfolio, the Escuela takes graphic production as the first step in self-determination and autonomy, and so demonstrates the “educational power of aesthetics: [its] capacity to recompose the collective world of sense by providing people with another sense of the world.”²⁶ The Escuela’s posters argue that graphic production can be a powerful tool for imagining and instigating social change, not just voicing criticism (as was the primary case in 1968). The very process itself values collective imaginings over individual artistic recognition, proving the power and possibility of collaboration in inspiring revolution.

Conclusion: Movements & Momentum

In their ephemera, students of the 1968 movement appropriated the visual language of the time — minimalist design, Pop Art — as a tool for dissent, as a means of communication, and a strategy for using the master’s tools to talk back. They “reformulated the relationship between art and politics, altering the collective imaginary with respect to art’s role in processes of socioeconomic transformation.”²⁷ The Mexico of 1968 was neither the glossy ultra-mod of Wyman’s Olympics nor the mystical Teotihuacán of the then-newly inaugurated National Museum of Anthropology. The Mexico of 1968 was bloody, reeling from fifty years of state repression and instability. The Mexico of 1968 was angry, and it was loud.

In our present-day, in the face of Disaster Capitalism, print production offers a means for voicing dissent and, most importantly, for envisioning visual alternatives to this oppressive reality. After all, “many in the global North still seem to find comfort in the belief that the worst consequences . . . are far enough away or far enough in the future that they will not
live to experience them. There is an almost imperceptible ambient noise of rising seas and plodding upward of food prices, but this is hard to hear.”28 With their prints — especially with showing them in college art museums and other cultural institutions throughout the United States — the Escuela makes its viewers come face to face with the world they live in. This is a world of ecological violence, of human rights abuses, and of injustice and inequality.

Yet the Escuela does not dwell on the debilitating effects of late-stage capitalism; instead, the collective focuses on visual praxis as a tool for social change. A call to action underscores each of the Escuela’s images, a latent sense of hope, much like the rightful indignation present in the ephemera of 1968. As Amanda de La Garza & Sol Henaro reflect:

“Puedes ver que no somos unos vándalos ni unos rebeldes sin causa, como se nos ha tachado con extraordinaria frecuencia. Puedes darte cuenta de nuestro silencio.”30

Now you can see that we are not vandals or rebels without a cause, as we have been written off as with increasing frequency. Now you can see our silence.

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Notes
4. The Martyrs of 68 School for Popular Art, hereby referred to as the Escuela.
8. Armando Aquino Casas, et al., eds., 68+50 (Mexico City: MUAC, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2018), 129-130.
12. The Escuela prints at SCMA were all purchased with the Eva W. Nair, Smith College Class of 1928 fund. I first encountered these prints while working at the Museum. Displayed in the “Talk Back” space — where visitors record their responses through post-its plastered around campus. What made the Escuela so captivating? The SCMA seems intent on diversifying its practices of college art museums could benefit from close examination of examples such as the Escuela.
13. Translation by author.
14. As referenced by Rebecca Hidalgo in the beginning of this section.
15. 68+50, 125. Jorge Pérez Vega was active during the student movement, helping produce much of the student movement’s ephemera. He continued to build on this momentum of collective organizing through establish
ing Grupo Mira—one of the most emblematic Mexican art collectives of the twentieth century—and leading the poster workshop for students at the Autonomous University of Puebla.
17. The Escuela, specifically, allies itself strongly with the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) engaged in the fight for dignified life for Indigenous people in Chiapas.
18. Tomba identifies anonymity as a key component of insurgent universalism, stating that “when democra
cy is real, its practice does not need great personalities or leaders” (2). This makes the constant references to Zapata and other figureheads (for both the Escuela and students in 1968) especially curious. If the whole point of collective organizing is the refusal of individualism or idol-worshiping, why portray these figures at all? I believe that these figures were/are necessary for social movements to effectively engage with their opponents—they provide a mask of personality to rally behind. Especially when coupled with a process of dis
identification, the figures become not just celebrities, but powerful stand-ins for revolutionary ideals, for entire movements, protecting and inspiring organizers behind their very recognition.
20. Zapata, of mixed Nahua and Spanish descent, thus explicitly becomes part of a lineage of Indigenous resis
tance in the Americas. Weaponizing racial constructs is a recurring strategy, especially throughout the history of Latin America, on both sides of center and periphery. In the specific context, for example, it would be important to recall the impact of José Vasconcelos’ 1929 essay “La Raza Cósmica,” which argues that the mixed heritage of the Americas contains the possibility of transcending racial conflict. Contemporary discourse problematizes Vasconcelos’ universalizing approach, as the impact of racial tensions, however constructed, continues to leave people destitute throughout the continent.
23. As further explained by Luis M. Castañeda and others, this statue also serves as an instrument of Mex
can nationalist discourse.
29. Emma Cuba, “The Zapatistas and the Me


29. 68+50, 215.

Representations of the Self During the Holocaust: Salomon and Nussbaum

Katherine Dollar | Syracuse University

During the Holocaust, many artists chose to represent the self, both how they interpreted themselves and how others interpreted them in the contemporary socio-political climate. While both Salomon and Nussbaum bear some similarities, there are critical differences in their modes of expression and representation that show how artists in seemingly parallel situations during the Holocaust can produce very different works portraying their own unique perception of it. It may be seen that being in similar situations does not necessitate depictions of the Holocaust itself, but rather similar emotions evoked by it that resurface traumatic memories.

Both Salomon and Nussbaum practiced art during their adolescence, beginning their formal training sixteen years apart (he in 1920, she in 1936), giving them academic experience in the art world and years-long development of style and technique. This was during the time in which Expressionism was a growing movement, with many German artists experimenting in the manner, while others worked in reaction against it. Salomon was a member of the Expressionist movement, which focused on representing strong emotions through the use of bright colors and dynamic compositions rather than a naturalistic representation of the world. Nussbaum’s work, however, has been situated under the New Objectivity heading, a reactionary movement against Expressionism and the romantic idealizations associated with it.

Additionally, Salomon and Nussbaum both produced much of the art that they are known for today while hiding from the Nazis. This is critical to the themes that they chose to represent. Salomon is best known for her series Life? or Theater? (Leben? oder Theater?), completed between 1941 and 1943. In this series, she depicts the lives of her family and friends as well as her own against the political backdrop of the period. Meanwhile, Nussbaum’s work has a strong focus on his own life, identity, and experiences as a Jewish man in Europe, painting many self-portraits during the time he was in hiding. Both of their art reflects perceptions of the self, especially amid crisis, personal, political, and social. Feelings...
of fear and despair are immediately prevalent in both artists’ works. Salomon differs in that these feelings are not rooted only in the persecution she faced, but also in the mental health issues that afflicted herself and multiple members of her family.

Salomon was a Jewish artist born in Berlin, Germany, in 1917, growing up during the rule of the Weimar Republic. She was admitted to the State Art Academy in Berlin in 1936, studying painting there for only briefly before the Third Reich made it too dangerous for her to attend school anymore. Her family fled Germany, and Salomon was sent to live with her grandparents, who had settled at the Villefranche-sur-Mer commune in France in 1939, later moving to an apartment in Nice the next year. However, after this move, she would come to face her family’s tragic history with mental illness, including her grandmother’s depression. Soon, that depression would worsen, and Salomon witnessed her mother’s suicide. Thereafter, Salomon’s grandfather revealed a string of suicides that ran through her maternal family’s history, predominantly the women. She learned that her own mother, who had died when Salomon was only nine years old, had been one of these suicides. Salomon had previously been under the impression that her mother had died of influenza, not learning the truth until thirteen years after her death. This was kept secret due to Salomon’s young age and because suicide was viewed as shameful and taboo in a time when mental health was not discussed openly. Unsurprisingly, learning this information about her family members’ deaths had an extremely strong effect on Salomon, leading her to contemplate in the final pages of Life? or Theater? (Leben? oder Theater?) and writing of herself in the third person: “The question: whether to take her own life or to undertake something eccentric and mad.” She felt as if she were the heir to this legacy of suicide and that in order to defy it, she must find something to occupy herself as an outlet for her emotions and a form of distraction. From this, she produced the series for which she has become best known to this day, the aforementioned Life? or Theater?. She worked on the series from 1940 to 1943, when she was taken to Auschwitz and was likely murdered within the first hour of her arrival.

Life? or Theater? has become Salomon’s most iconic work, comprising approximately 800 untitled gouache paintings completed between 1940 and 1942, although the total output is closer to roughly 1,350 pieces since a number of them were rejected by her.¹ The series is divided into acts and scenes, following the structure of a musical comedy with a prologue, main section or plot, and an epilogue. The figures featured are relatively consistent throughout the series, as they are meant to reflect her own life and experiences as well as those of her family members. While the images serve as a memoir, she does not directly depict herself or her family, instead representing everyone with autobiographical characters. About a quarter of the images feature these transparencies, appending dialogue to the painted image, enhancing and narrating the scene from the characters’ perspectives. This use of transparencies emphasizes her intention for the series to be interpreted as a play, with the addition of spoken word an active part of the viewing experience.

The prologue begins in 1913 with the death of Salomon’s Aunt Charlotte, after whom she was named, and narrates Salomon’s childhood, highlighting moments she felt were formative. One of these moments is depicted in the untitled closing gouache (Fig. 1) of Scene One in the prologue in which Salomon uses her characters to act out the passing of her mother. Rather than explicitly showing her mother’s suicide, Salomon instead presents herself (renamed Charlotte Kann) as a child lying beside her mother (referred to as Franziska throughout the series) in a bed in the bottom left corner of the composition against a flat, solid blue background. The figures are simplified and two-dimensional, outlined with thick black lines. In this, Salomon recalls her memories of lying next to her mother as she told Salomon of a wonderful and heavenly afterlife, asking her if it would not be nice if she (Franziska) became an angel.² A small figure representing Franziska’s soul is seen to the left of Salomon and her mother. The figure is repeated eight times, each one positioned higher than the last until the final figure reaches what is meant to be interpreted as heaven in the upper register. A mass of generic, faceless figures is standing on either side of God enthroned, greeting her mother’s spirit.

Franziska lying in bed is reflected in the bottom right corner and overlaps the foot of the first bed in the left corner, and Salomon is instead shown standing next to the bed rather than also lying in it, perhaps indicating the prominence of her mother’s death over her life in her memory. Above the second bed is a window, through which Franziska, as an angel, is seen delivering a letter to her daughter. Salomon feels, or at least hopes, that her mother has become an angel. The use of an entirely blue background also suggests this reading, adding a sense of calm to the composition.

Recalling this memory of how her mother viewed and discussed death plays a large role in understanding Salomon’s situation at the time the painting was created. She produced this gouache while hiding at Villefranche avoiding Nazi persecution. While this region of France was, for a time, not deporting Jewish refugees — and thus safer for Salomon and her family — the looming threat of invasion was ever-present. Accordingly, death was a subject difficult not to dwell on, especially amid her grandmother’s recent suicide and the revelation of other suicides in her family history. It is unsurprising, then, that the character Franziska’s suicide was chosen as a concluding setpiece for the first scene in the series; however, it is not as depressing or gloomy as one might expect given the subject matter and the events unfolding in Salomon’s life at the time. Instead, it is a bright composition, more typical of her Expressionist paintings that focus on moments she spent with her mother while still alive and portray her in a peaceful state after death.

This representation of her mother as an angel embodies the romantic, individual nature of Expressionism. She focuses on her own perception of and emotional reaction to that memory. She uses this scene, and the series as a whole, as a vehicle for self-expression of her own experiences, especially those in which she is under pressure or duress. Although the Holocaust is not depicted explicitly throughout Salomon’s series, her being in hiding played a role in her ability to harness the emotions she conveys in her work. Fleeing persecution causes self-reflection and surely evoked old memories of her mother, to which Salomon has attached new feelings, particularly...
with new knowledge of how she actually died. Therefore, the prologue itself may not address directly the Holocaust, but it is a factor in how she expresses her memories due to the introspection it elicits.

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Felix Nussbaum, like Salomon, was a Jewish artist born in Germany. He studied at multiple schools during the early to mid-1920s, including the Hamburg State School of Applied Arts and the Lewin Funcke School in Berlin, and he also continued his formal education in Rome in 1933. While Nussbaum was in Rome, Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels spoke in Italy, decreeing the ethos of art under the doctrine of the Third Reich, stating that the Aryan race and heroism were to be the main themes.³ Amid this threatening climate, Nussbaum fled with his partner Felka Platek to the city of Rapallo in 1934 and then later to Belgium. They lived as refugees until the German occupation of Belgium in 1940, when Nussbaum was arrested and taken to the Saint Cyprian concentration camp in France. After three dehumanizing months there, he escaped at the Bordeaux checkpoint and took a train back to Belgium. He reunited with his wife and began his life in hiding, constantly in danger of being discovered. With the aid of his Belgian friends, who helped provide Nussbaum with a studio and art supplies, the artist was able to produce a large body of paintings with dark, melancholic themes between 1940 and 1944, when he was discovered and arrested. Tragically, it was the smell of turpentine coming from his attic hideout that gave him — and his hideout — away. Nussbaum and his wife were sent to Mechelen — a transit camp — before being transported to Auschwitz, where they were both subsequently executed.

Nussbaum is best-known for his work produced during his four years in complete hiding, focusing strongly on his Jewish identity and the inner turmoil he was experiencing. His most famous work is perhaps Self Portrait with Jewish Identity Card (Fig. 2), painted with oil on canvas in 1943. Nussbaum places himself in the foreground of the painting and is seen only from the shoulders up, standing in front of a tall, dirty wall. This type of wall is used as a symbol of menace in his visual vocabulary,⁴ representing how he was trapped both physically and emotionally under the rule of the Nazis. The wall rises above his head and meets a second wall to form a corner to the left of the artist, further emphasizing that he feels trapped and cornered in a place he cannot escape.

The artist is also seen holding a card with his identifying information and upturning the collar of his coat up to reveal a Star of David. The inclusion of these symbols does not speak to Nussbaum’s religiosity; in sharp contrast, these religious identifiers have become symbols of persecution. Under the Third Reich, Jewish people would not voluntarily wear symbols proclaiming their identity, especially in hiding, for the obvious fear of being arrested by Nazis. Nussbaum instead places the Star of David on his coat and inserts a fictitious identity card to express his fear of being caught and the degradation he and every other Jewish person faced at the hands of Nazi soldiers. This is further emphasized by his act of lifting the collar of his coat in an attempt to obscure his face and hide. He is seen in three-quarter view, his head turned slightly to engage the viewer with an intense, penetrating gaze outward. He has an alert expression that is somewhat secretive, as if he is asking the viewer to not expose his

FIG. 2 Felix Nussbaum, Self-Portrait with Jewish Identity Card, 1943 (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem).
identity. In fact, he implores us to contemplate what it means to be a Jewish person in Europe at the time including the constant dangers associated with it.

In the background beyond the wall, storm clouds sit against a dark sky. To the left, we see a building with windows, the curtains drawn looking out at the wall where Nussbaum is trapped. This building may represent his hiding space, both a place of shelter and continual fear and tension. A dead, limbless tree is placed in the background to the right of the building. This is a prominent symbol in Jewish funerary art as well as in Nussbaum’s personal body of work. In Jewish funerary art, a dead tree is used to represent a life cut short by an early or untimely death. Nussbaum uses it in his paintings as a symbol of melancholy, hopelessness, and death. This tree in Self Portrait with Jewish Identity Card therefore represents his despair over the state he is living in, his mourning the millions of lives already lost at that time, and his fear of becoming one of those lives lost. However, if we look closely, a small branch with flower blossoms grows from one of the lower limbs of the tree, highlighted by a patch of blue sky. The blossoming branch expresses his remaining bit of optimism that somehow he will make it out alive as well as a more universal human desire to hold onto hope even in the most desperate of situations.

Along with his own representation in self-portraits, Nussbaum also painted images with more generalized figures as in Camp Synagogue (Fig. 3) completed in 1941. In this painting, five men face away from the viewer, depicted in the desolate setting of the Saint Cyprian camp (where Nussbaum had been imprisoned for three months in 1940). The painting is bleak and dismal, with its dark, muted color palette conveying a palpable sense of hopelessness. The land is barren, and the sky is dark gray with a black cloud obscuring the sun and several birds flying overhead. Strewed across the ground is debris from the camp, including a shoe, a bone, an empty tin can, and barbed wire. All of these are symbols of the harsh conditions in the camp: the shoe representing the piles of shoes taken from the bodies of murdered prisoners; the can and bone symbolizing death—and, more specifically, starvation and cremation; and the barbed wire literalizing the actual wire that trapped the detainees. At the center of the composition, Nussbaum recalls the makeshift synagogue at Saint Cyprian. It is haphazardly constructed with metal sheets strewn over the roof, a testament to the poor conditions and dearth of materials at the camp.

A group of four figures united in prayer and dressed in tallitot (fringed prayer shawls) is seen facing the synagogue. Their tallitot are painted at an exaggerated length, whether intentionally or not, giving them the appearance of a shroud. This emphasizes the melancholic mood of the composition and draws attention to their Jewish identity and beliefs. A lone fifth figure, whom historians have suggested is meant to represent Nussbaum, is seen to the right of the group, as if he is separating himself from them. The sense that he does not identify with them despite also wearing a tallit is conveyed through his posture and orientation. No part of his face can be seen, and his back faces toward the viewer. He is slouched over, and his shoulders are hunched, creating a feeling of defeat. He appears much more tense than the members of the group to his left, once again suggesting a separation from them. By wearing the tallit as the group does, it suggests this figure still feels a connection to them through their Jewish identity but cannot join them in their unwavering devotion due to a sense of lost spirituality from his time at Saint Cyprian.

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Much like Salomon, Nussbaum focuses on his personal experiences and introspection. Both artists incorporate a mix of positive and negative emotions, including overwhelming despair and fear as well as hope. However, Nussbaum’s work more obviously expresses the aspect of melancholy. His palette is more muted and gritty, using gray and earthen tones to convey the dejectedness he was experiencing. Salomon, however, uses bright, unnatural colors that give her paintings a deceptively lighter atmosphere, despite the darker themes that her work takes on. This is a key difference between the Expressionist movement of which Salomon was a part and the New Objectivity movement to which Nussbaum belonged. Although both artists were in hiding during the War, Salomon’s situation was much different than that of Nussbaum. While she hid in a cottage in an area believed to be relatively safe, Nussbaum hid in an attic, in danger of being discovered at any given moment. This variance...
in their circumstances would have had different effects on their emotions, perhaps resulting in the contrast in color and stylistic choices that distinguish their work. While it cannot be stated that one artist suffered more than the other as they both faced extremely adverse situations and endured traumatic experiences, it is clear that Nussbaum’s isolation resulted in gloomier scenes.

Whether intentionally or not, at the height of their traumas Salomon and Nussbaum each represent their mental states, thus reflecting on how their experiences during the Holocaust shaped their perceptions of themselves. Indeed, despite their stylistic differences, the two artists portray themselves repeatedly, either explicitly in self-portraits or by reimagining themselves as characters. For Salomon, learning the truth about her family’s history of suicides during a time in which she faced fatal persecution encouraged her to use art as a means of processing new and old trauma and, in her own words, “to live for them all,” creating compositions that are mournful and hopeful. In Nussbaum’s case, his loss of faith and increased contemplation on what it meant to be a Jewish person during that time and how it applied to him takes precedence over chronicling his life.

In foregrounding their Jewish identities and life events, Salomon and Nussbaum’s art can be interpreted as acts of resistance. For Nussbaum, this meant depicting his experience of the Saint Cyprian concentration camp and his connection to Judaism during a time when he was being persecuted for being Jewish and in hiding after escaping the camp. For Salomon, it meant resisting the stigma surrounding mental health, openly expressing her emotions about the many suicides in her family and using art as a vessel to express her own struggles with her mental health. For both, the ultimate act of resistance was creating a powerful body of work that survives the War itself: Salomon and Nussbaum defiantly contemplate their identities while in hiding, powerful records of the self that, despite the traumas of the Holocaust, continue to live on to this day.

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Notes
5. Ibid.