



Early spirit vessel (burnished red pottery jar), fifth century BCE, Korea. Visual Resources, Department of Art, University of Chicago. From *Dialogues in Art History* by Elizabeth Cropper (ed.).

standing across fields and cultures'. The intention of the two-day symposium upon which the book is based was to bring together speakers and audience in a cross-fertilising diachronic debate covering a selection of the broad range of areas that reflected the life of the Centre over its past quarter century.

The scholars represented in the book are some of the most noted in their field and include Svetlana Alpers, Elizabeth Hill Boone, Philippe Bordes, Betsy M Bryan, C Jean Campbell, Joseph Connors, Charles Dempsey, Marian H Feldman, Finbarr Barry Flood, Hal Foster, Marc Gotlieb, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Michael Leja, Yukio Lippit, Joanne Pillsbury, Louise Rice, David J Roxburgh, Jeffrey Weiss, Mariët Westermann, and Wu Hung. The essays embrace art from all over the world, and many periods, from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, pre-conquest Mexico and Peru, twelfth-century Afghanistan, Renaissance and baroque Italy, eighteenth-century Japan and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, and the United States in the twentieth and present centuries, as well as a methodological proposal for rethinking East Asian tombs.

The essays are arranged to be read in pairs, focusing on an issue, a period, or a crux of scholarship. For example, Betsy M Bryan and Marian H Feldman dovetail work on memory, knowledge and the circularity of time, Bryan through Egyptian tomb painting and Feldman with Meso-

potamian monuments. Bray considers how tomb chapel paintings assisted the deceased family member to cross the divide between this world and the afterlife and at the same time created memories that also manipulated knowledge, in pursuit of their immortality. Feldman recognises that when people accrete around an object, then that object, through its continued use, becomes more than its function, and thus the object and the people who use it create intertwined histories. This leads to the idea that objects

contain cultural biographies endowed with an aura of potency. Both scholars reflect on the transformative qualities of art and object. Charles Dempsey and C Jean Campbell both argue convincingly for a reinterpretation of the Renaissance in terms of the visual vernacular, a sensibility that flourished from the Trecento onwards and that was heralded by both Aby Warburg and Henry Thode in the late nineteenth century. This re-examination of the vividness of the lived experience, particularly in Simone Martini's *Maestà*, together with the emergence of Franciscan spirituality and urban culture, opens new ways of thinking about this period in history.

These paired papers were chosen in the community spirit of the Centre. The authors were encouraged to share their essays prior to presentation with their dialogic companions and to maintain the thought flow during and after the conference. A dynamic which emerged during the conference and has found its way into this volume is the debate between Svetlana Alpers and Mariët Westermann based on the papers they delivered. Both papers and the debate that followed are published verbatim as delivered at the symposium. This adds a heightened present-tense feel to the work.

What emerges from this richly diverse book is the extent to which eminent art historians are willing to challenge traditional frameworks and find fresh and invigorating ways of approaching the many facets of art history. In her introduction, Elizabeth Cropper suggests that the 20 scholars represented in this volume, by their vigour, the complexity of their ideas and their readiness to debate those ideas

in discussion, may help the history of art to 'seek out possibilities for the future in possibilities overlooked in the present or lost in the past'. Inevitably, some will appeal more than others. Yet there is enough diversity to appreciate the debate and every essay offers rich thought.

Containing a multitude of exquisitely produced colour and black and white plates, there is much in this book that will keep the academic mind engaged with new methodologies for their own art historical research. It reflects the fruitful interaction of scholars in the visual arts across genres, which is the intention of the Center, and exhibits scholarship that is both broad-ranging and breath-taking in its ability to challenge and give pause to rethink approaches. This is a valuable addition to any art historian's library.

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TIME OUT OF JOINT: RECALL AND EVOCATION IN RECENT ART

LUIGI FASSI ET AL. (EDS)

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Time Out of Joint is the catalogue of an exhibition held at The Kitchen in New York City in summer 2009. The show contained 15 works by 12 international artists. The majority of the works were videos or films (thus many of the catalogue's illustrations are film or video stills), accompanied by a pair of performances, an artist's book, and a suite of large inkjet prints. The exhibition was co-curated by four participants enrolled in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program, a one-year postgraduate course focusing on contemporary art, criticism, curating, and critical studies. The four curators of the exhibition included the three editors of the catalogue and Roya Rastegar; each of the four contributes an individual essay to the catalogue.

The essays are preceded by a 'Keywords' section: roughly a page on each of seven key curatorial terms: temporality, space, ideology, evocation, crisis, hesitation, and rupture. There is a similar amount of text describing the work of each artist and sometimes intimating how the work exemplifies the theme of the exhibition. That theme is most clearly expressed in the brief preface to the catalogue:

Time Out of Joint examines artistic practices that employ evocation as a mode of connecting the present to the past . . . the act of evoking makes possible a rupture, a condition that challenges historical assumptions and ingrained systems of domination, on both a personal and also a wider sociopolitical scale.

Walter Benjamin's essay, 'Theses on the philosophy of history' is invoked as the primary theoretical influence on the curatorial choices:

His concept of rupture is thus relevant . . . in which the present has no presence and constantly disappears in the transition to the future. . . . The act of calling forth – or evoking – past instances . . . serves to energize efforts toward change in the current moment.

In sum, this sweeping and provocative exhibition catalogue is an especially ambitious attempt to characterise the contemporary artworks it contains as, in one fashion or another, reconfiguring the relationship of the present to the past. Still more unusual is the self-understanding of the curators in relation to the exhibition and its theme: they portray themselves not as mere organisers or documenters of recent artwork, but rather, they see their curatorial practice as a means of fomenting social and political mobilisation and transformation. Nonetheless, their essays make the aims of the show still more elusive.

Luigi Fassi's essay, 'Rewriting as spirit of cleavage: Common sense and social transformability', relies heavily on the writings of Antonio Gramsci in order to interpret the exhibited works as sharing 'a desire to investigate the ideological use of temporality by unmasking its role in the construction of common sense'. Thus Fikret Atay's *Rebels of the Dance* (2002), a 10-minute video of a pair of Kurdish teens singing and dancing in an ATM vestibule in a Turkish village, is enlisted as evidence of the 'spirit of resistance interpreted as a tool of counter-ideological struggle'. Lucy Gallun's essay, 'Interstitial potential: A conception of spatio-temporalities' is indebted to several theorists, including Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Gallun reads a number of the works as encounters with marginal or blank spaces, which are understood to be potential places where an alternative present might be figured. Roya Rastegar's contribution, 'Time is money and freedom is free: Curatorial practice, history, and the erotics of freedom' is informed by the work of Audre Lorde and begins with the

author's proclamation that 'I am invested in reorganizing cultural spaces and disrupting mechanisms by which value is protected for some, to the exclusion of many others'. Consistent with the spirit of disruption the curator, Rastegar, discusses no work in the exhibition but instead treats the work of multimedia artist Alma Lopez and documentary filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris. Rastegar presents both these artists by way of Lorde's erotics of freedom, and thus as a means to increase the 'possibilities of freedom' through a transformation of the conventional relationships to space and to self. Repeating Rastegar's turn away from the works in the exhibition, Jakob Schillinger's essay, 'Recessional aesthetics: Artistic practice and the chrono-logic of capitalism' deals exclusively with what the author terms the 'brand' Paul Chan, whose 'brand' he sees as 'symptomatic of a certain conjuncture at our current moment'. The author explains the current moment as consisting of a disillusionment with political art in combination with the production of spectacular works of depoliticised art. As Chan is a successful artist in this moment, the essay thereby accuses him of being complicit with the failures of the current moment. This seems a particularly harsh charge to level against Chan since by dint of his own engagement with the work of Walter Benjamin one would expect Schillinger and his fellow curators to enlist him in their cause. And yet the essay ends by undermining itself:

'I am articulating my thoughts . . . in a format that produces precisely the authorial voice I meant to criticize'. The conclusion of the catalogue: self-defeatism in the service of mobilisation, emancipation, empowerment, and freedom. I recommend this volume to anyone wishing to understand the present curatorial desire to redeem the politically transformative potential of artworks.

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FROM THE PRIVATE COLLECTIONS OF TEXAS: EUROPEAN ART, ANCIENT TO MODERN

RICHARD R BRETTELL
AND C D DICKERSON III

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When, in February 2005, the *Houston Chronicle* reported Caroline Wiess Law's stunning bequest (estimated to be worth \$450 million) to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, it took about a day for its northern neighbour, the Dallas Museum of Art, to announce irrevocable bequests of art and funds from seven local collectors to rival that astro-

Vincent van Gogh, *Street in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer* (1888). Private collection, Fort Worth. From *The Private Collections of Texas: European Art, Ancient to Modern* by Richard R Brettell and C D Dickerson III.

