

Re-returns: On Future Art Histories

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Unlearning is, among other things, a method of curating new directions for a future still to be imagined. Yet, in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019: 70), Ariella Azoulay also called for diverse modalities of ‘rehearsal, reversal, rewinding, repairing, renewing, reacquiring, redistributing, readjusting, reallocating.’ The practice of re-doing, with reparation at its core, not only frames the notion of return, but also those of re-thinking and re-writing. This re-launch issue of *Revista de História da Arte* focuses on the topic of ‘Re-returns: on future art histories’. Taking all of those broad conceptual categories into close consideration, re-turn might then be a useful strategy to revisit and unlearn in order to understand anew. Contributors to the issue have sought to mobilise art history to address different chronologies and spatial organisations in order to repair a multiplicity of entangled pasts. In Azoulay’s words (2019: 539), ‘[R]eparation is the right of return and the right to return – return as a reparative modality that rewinds the movement of the forward-thrusting shutter.’ Indeed, as Silvina Rodrigues Lopes remarked in *O Nascer do Mundo nas suas Passagens* (Edições do Saguão, 2021), the word ‘to repair’ (*reparar*) in Portuguese also contains an additional meaning: ‘to pay attention’. While Azoulay also makes the case for undoings, the contributions to this themed issue of *Revista de História da Arte* explore returns and reversals, rewritings and renewals, paying attention to how we can learn, analyse, archive, articulate, represent, record and otherwise uncover. This is the beginning of a conversation on art history(-ies) for the future, which we hope to inspire through the digital pages of *Revista de História da Arte*, interrogating the intersections of chronologies,

geographies and methodologies. This re-launch issue marks an important moment for the journal but also for its growing community of contributors and readers, not only in the context of the increasing urgency of the arts and humanities in contemporary life, but also amid the surging development of interdisciplinary and transnational research which often bears artistic practice at its core as a vital element for transformation, be it cultural, social, environmental, economic or otherwise. With this issue we therefore celebrate a diversity of approaches that take re-turn as a particular point of reflection.

Art history may be positioned as a discipline and a practice that frames cultures and identities which can build on (and, conversely, contest) knowledge(s) concerning power relations, inequalities, silencings and invisibilities that still shape the world today. By conflating the arts with histories, it can also spotlight unquestioned assumptions and expose fault lines so as to generate a more complex, responsible, inclusive, and comprehensive landscape of stories towards a future led by social justice and equality. Of course, art history is itself part of discursive formations that have also served to reinforce and/or contribute to current power relations. Nonetheless, it also harbours the potential to think across disciplines such as literary studies, postcolonial theory, indigenous histories, anthropology, and digital humanities, querying the past by paying attention to the ways in which power relations shape culture, relaying dominant values through material, performative, and visual means. In the context of decolonial thinking and making, curatorial approaches, intersectionality, ethics of care, artistic pedagogies and/or feminist politics, to name some of the frameworks that have generated novel approaches to art history, theory, and practice, the discipline has become critically enriched and expanded, re-visiting the past so as to challenge its abiding legacies but also to re-evaluate the transformations that it has enabled.

The re-launch issue of *Revista de História da Arte* includes diverse contributions ranging from academic articles to creative responses exploring the pressing challenges for art history around the issue of 'return', questioning how it can meaningfully engage with the urgency of lives in the contemporary context. How might art history foster thinking across disciplines, timelines, geographies and materialities whilst reckoning with the past, undoing and rewriting histories and discussing what the future holds? This issue signals the increasing need to reshape the critical directions of art history by reflecting on its rich legacies and troubling omissions. Which scholarly trajectories will heed the potential to return to and to re-turn historical consciousness? Our hope is that this conversation will continue in future issues of the journal. Our ambition is to facilitate a publishing platform for a collective and communal imagining of the future of art history as a discipline

but also as a commitment to a practice and a process that may pave the way for more equal, ethical, responsible, and caring communal futures.

The current issue includes five articles and two creative contributions on interrelated topics that interrogate re-turns through their engagement with dissemination platforms, discursive spaces, notions of restitution and countervisuality, and the building of new and/or alternative knowledges via curatorial, oral or visual negotiations. The first article, 'Afterlives: How the Contemporary Art Periodical Shapes the Futures of Art History' by Camilla Salvaneschi, a postdoctoral fellow at the Università Luav di Venezia (Italy), considers the diversity of strategies employed by dominant art periodicals such as *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *October*, and *Parkett* to outlive their own demise and dismissal. Salvaneschi interrogates these phenomena as part of the ongoing transformation of art periodicals from an ephemeral and precarious material to their acquisition of a newfound status as permanent and historically treasured documents.

The third article shifts the focus to the contested issue of repatriation that is at the heart of the critical agenda today. In 'Yaawo Beadwork in European Ethnographic Museums: A Call to Expand Cultural Repatriation Conversations', Beatriz Madaleno Alves (Leiden University, The Netherlands), a researcher of Eastern African material culture, reassesses contemporary debates surrounding cultural repatriation by highlighting lesser-known African material objects stored in European institutions, namely the Yaawoo beadwork culture that is housed at The British Museum. This case study serves as a springboard to consider a more expanded notion of cultural repatriation, honing in on the complex work that ought to be done by cultural workers and academics in such less-publicised cases, when there is no solid legal case for formal restitution per se. Related to this, the Berlin-based Jewish multidisciplinary artist Hagar Ophir has authored a creative contribution to this themed issue, 'Final (?) DISPOSITION. Restless Objects'. Ophir develops a fictional script surrounding the journey of objects from the Ethnological Museum in Dahlem to the newly created and controversial Humboldt Forum in Berlin, probing ideas of training, rehearsal, and repetition in an attempt to reconceptualise the vexing relationship between imperial institutions as caretakers and the status of artistic objects as plundered items.

The following chapter 'The Bird's Eye From Up Above or From Down Below: Changing Perspectives on Aerial Photography of Indigenous Lands in the Brazilian Amazon', by Marcella Legrand Marer, a curator and PhD candidate at the University of Zurich (Switzerland), carefully attends to the much disseminated visual trope of aerial photography depicting indigenous people reacting to and defending themselves against the aeroplane pointing cameras at them, reviewing it as part of an imperial complex of visuality reproduced in Brazil since the 1940s. In turn,

and conversely, she also investigates how the current popularity of drones enables indigenous communities to reappropriate these photographs and videos from above, subverting this regime of surveillance to fight back against it, as the legal means report and document several environmental crimes and human rights violations. Meanwhile, Martim Ramos, an artist and guest lecturer in visual and media studies at Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (Portugal), presents a visual essay entitled 'a darker, better place', the outcome of an artist's residence at the Centre for Urban History in Lviv, Ukraine, in 2018. Dwelling on their video archives and culling still images from 1960s TV footage, Ramos put together a semi-fictional installation around a peaceful community in Ukraine that decided to evade the hazards of a world on the brink of disaster during the Cold War, both as a commentary on the current state of affairs in that part of the world and as a meditation on the dualisms of fact and fiction, past and present, archive and potential, that is always already inscribed in images.

In 'The Vulnerable Body in the Archive: *Matriculating* Oral Herstories of Art with (Self-)care', interdisciplinary art historian, curator, and activist Zofia Reznik takes into consideration the history of women artists in Wrocław, Poland, during the 1970s, interrogating the ways in which these artists were not assimilated into conventional art historical narratives. This, in turn, leads her to call for a host of renewed methodological approaches, foregrounding issues of personal connection, mutual trust, collective knowledge, and shared agency, all while combining the conceptual tools of cultural anthropology, social history, archival studies, and feminist theory. In the final article of this issue, entitled 'Curating proximities: the parallels of Baltic and Sámi art', Marija Griniuk, a performance artist and the director at Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Norway and Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania, puts forwards a new set of methodological approaches for curating political performance art from Sámi and Baltic artists, interrogating the curatorial protocols used to address their live art and performances hinged on postcolonial memory when presented before international audiences.

References

- Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. 2019. *Potential History. Unlearning imperialism*. London, New York: Verso.
- Lopes, Silvina Rodrigues. 2021. *O Nascer do Mundo nas suas Passagens*. Lisboa: Edições do Saguão.