



Visual & Critical Studies, Student Press

2016

2016 BA Annual Visual and Critical Studies

Haladyn, Julian, Hope, Chantelle, Miller, Michelle, Moser, Gabrielle, Wilson-Sanchez, Maya and McLachlan, Tucker

Suggested citation:

Haladyn, Julian, Hope, Chantelle, Miller, Michelle, Moser, Gabrielle, Wilson-Sanchez, Maya and McLachlan, Tucker (2016) 2016 BA Annual Visual and Critical Studies. OCAD University. Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1249/>

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.

A surreal, painterly illustration of a forest. The scene is dominated by various shades of green, from deep forest greens to bright, almost neon greens. In the upper center, a large, glowing green jellyfish floats, its translucent bell and trailing tentacles rendered with soft, ethereal light. To the right, a wooden fence made of rough-hewn logs runs across the frame. In the lower right foreground, several large, detailed mushrooms with brown caps and white gills are scattered among the dense foliage. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and otherworldly, with a focus on texture and color.

BA ANNUAL
Visual and Critical Studies

2016

BA ANNUAL 2016

BA ANNUAL

Visual and Critical Studies

Editorial Committee

Julian Haladyn

Chantelle Hope

Michelle Miller

Gabby Moser

Maya Wilson-Sanchez

Designed by Tucker McLachlan and Maya Wilson-Sanchez
for the OCAD U Student Press

Set in Portrait Text by Berton Hasebe

Printed by Colour Code Printing

Supported by the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences
and School of Interdisciplinary Studies

For more information about the Honours BA program in
Visual and Critical Studies, visit:
www.ocadu.ca/academics/undergraduate/visual-critical-studies

Cover image by Laura Thippawong (4th year)

Retrieval (detail), 2015, oil on canvas, 60 × 48"

I use my art to channel the most complex thoughts and ideas I find myself dwelling upon, turning them into visual evidence. By engaging psychological narratives, displaced imagery, dreams, nightmares, and re-imagined archetypes, I hope to catch a glimpse of what remains most inaccessible. Digging out buried pieces of the mind means having to reconcile those pieces, however terrifying or ecstatic, with what it means to be human. I am intent on searching the areas where good and evil, predator and prey, beauty and the grotesque converge.

2016

Introduction

The first BA Annual publication celebrates the work of current and graduating students in OCAD University's first Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours program in Visual and Critical Studies. Comprising critical essays, exhibition reviews, artist portfolios, and creative non-fiction, the inaugural volume reflects the innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to art history and visual culture that are at the core of this unique program.

The BA in Visual and Critical Studies emphasizes the expanded field of modern and contemporary art history, which includes design, photography, architecture, performance, and new media as well as painting and sculpture. Set in the creative and dynamic environment of Canada's premiere art and design university, the BA program offers students the opportunity to study art history as it is being made, incorporating field trips, guest lectures by international scholars, work placements, and a final thesis research project. Integrating select studio courses into the core program of study, and offering a range of innovative interdisciplinary minors to choose from, the Visual and Critical Studies program provides an exciting opportunity to understand visual culture as both a scholar and a practitioner.

Contents

CRITICAL ESSAYS

- 15 Excerpt from *Caution and Curiosity: Allegories of Sexual Predation in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves"*
By Laura Thippawong
- 28 *Toward A Definition of New Media Art*
By Lex Burgoyne
- 32 *Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects: Trade, Cultural Imperialism, and Western Influence in 19th-century China*
By Annie Xu
- 37 Excerpt from *The Sublime and the Limits of Delimiting*
By Sylvia Evans

CREATIVE ESSAYS

- 9 *Old Intuitions*
By Won Jeon

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

- 12 *The Garden of Ideas: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*
By Maya Wilson-Sanchez

ARTIST PORTFOLIOS

- 19 *Disruptions of Site*
By Chantelle Hope

42 CONTRIBUTORS

44 THESIS ABSTRACTS

Old Intuitions

By Won Jeon

Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality.

An experience is a product; one might almost say a by-product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world.

—John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934

John Dewey's theory of "having an experience" speaks to me with great lucidity, almost frighteningly so. He argues that art and life can be interchangeable, nested within each other, acted out and upon each other. These aesthetic experiences can be had everywhere within our everyday lives, but Dewey acknowledges the complex makeup of our culture. We live in a culture that situates us at the center of contemporary hyper-productivity, in which we try to keep our feelings of loss and displacement at bay with the hysteria of activity. The epistemologies traditionally associated with the modern, technological world in the West prioritize and privilege reason, mechanization, objectivity, compartmentalization, and intellect over the unconscious, emotion, nature, and imagination. Anything determined

as originating from the latter denigrates into itself and is trivialized: laughed at and eventually self-loathed as romantic and naïve.

The story of technological expansion and human progress becomes our ultimate fetish, and we live at a pace and pattern that diverges so acutely away from the possibility of ‘integral experiences.’ Bursts of anxiety and depression greet us at night and in solitude, and we confront long stretches of numbness as a human condition. Through reading and reflecting on Dewey, I imagine a possibility, a life where I might be connected with a pace and a rhythm of living in which art—lucid, authentic, transforming experiences—is reachable, accepted and shared together.

Considering Dewey’s definition of art as an *action*, I ask myself constantly: *What can I do?* How do I make decolonization into a verb, a self-sustaining and renewing way to act, and ultimately, be? The work of finding what I can and must do, to follow the idea of living every day in the presence of such a rhythm, is my greatest task in decolonizing my mind and heart. To be open and observant to the moments and the people that reassure my agency, makes me feel alive, and feel a connection to something greater with an unspeakable clarity: these sustain me, keep me going. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey talks about such experiences of transformation that resonate with one as a human being: when we feel intimately connected with another being on the earth, or when we feel that perhaps we can be unique without wanting to be exclusive, or when we are inspired as we gratefully and delightedly wonder, allowing ourselves to be in awe.

What I know about writing and creating ultimately comes from that which makes me truthful, what grounds me as I live my daily obligations. This could be from the presence of certain energies or people, or flickering fragments of loved memories, or this morning’s wind as it danced to a peculiar music. These experiences guide my body, my thoughts, even as I write this now. My writing and thinking do not exist for the sake of sounding respectable or intimidating, or becoming a lionized intellectual who makes a name for themselves—although I see myself shape-shift, integrating into that discursive space of academia when needed. The crux of the challenge in such a space would be: how do I honour and protect my own voice?

The role of “art,” Dewey states, is to create space and time in our rushed and pushed lives, to intervene and *relate*; then rejuvenate, actually recognizing that moment as ‘an experience’ that hit-connects with something fundamental to who you are. Art for Dewey—creating, viewing, and living it—unifies us to something outside of our seemingly bounded up, secret individualities, while the individualities are still wholly expressed. This larger pattern and synchronization does not devour our interiority into a sweeping, generalizing, homogenous whole, but welcomes us into a gestalt; an accommodation of each self-composed and unique experience nested within yet another greater order. Dewey, whether he intended to or not, introduces a middle ground: a way of moving towards a configuration of being in the world, where I, and my experiences, are both outside me and within, in harmony with other beings and the land.

Exhibition Review

The Garden of Ideas: Contemporary Art from Pakistan

Agha Khan Museum, Toronto

September 18, 2014 to January 18, 2015

By Maya Wilson-Sanchez

At the ceremonial opening of Toronto's Ismaili Centre and Agha Khan Museum on September 12th, 2014, the Agha Khan delivered a speech that declared that these new buildings would "be filled with the sounds of enrichment, dialogue and warm human rapport as Ismailis and non-Ismailis share their lives in a healthy, gregarious spirit."¹ "The complex we inaugurate today," the Agha Khan continued, "is animated by a truly pluralistic spirit... it reflects the deep-set Ismaili values and pluralistic commitments that are so deeply embedded in Canadian values."² When I visited the museum two months later, I began to wonder whether the museum's programming accurately reflected the ideas of pluralism it was built upon. While the museum's mission statement suggests a troubling tendency to exoticize and "other" Islamic cultures for local audiences, the inaugural contemporary art exhibition, "The Garden of Ideas," featured works from six internationally-acclaimed Pakistani artists whose work addressed the diversity and ongoing

relevance of Islamic art and history through projects related to themes of the garden.

The Agha Khan Museum's mission statement asserts that its exhibitions will offer visitors a "window into worlds unknown or unfamiliar."³ While expanding visitors' cultural frames of reference is an admirable goal, the Agha Khan's statement inadvertently describes Islamic cultures in a homogenous manner, and in describing the Muslim world as unknown to visitors, it defines these cultures within a Eurocentric tradition that perpetuates Orientalism and makes a generalized claim about the existing knowledge of museum visitors. The Agha Khan Museum needs to recognize the impossibility of claiming the Islamic, not only to avoid making sweeping generalizations about a richly diverse culture, but also to exhibit Muslim histories and art in a more complex, specific, and pluralistic manner that better represents the past and present realities of Islamic societies.

"The Garden of Ideas" is one step in the right direction. Within the exhibition, Imram Qureshi's artworks mix traditional miniature painting and site-specific intervention in a series of works that are both complex in their historical reference but also specific in how they engage with the space of the museum. Aisha Khalid's tapestry shows, on one side, stylized Islamic designs depicting the *chahar bagh*, or the classic Persian garden, and on the other, more than one million gold-plated and steel pins that were used in the creation of the work. Khalid's work references Islamic tradition in both its aesthetic and its medium, but by leaving the pins present, it shows the artistic

process which is a prevalent characteristic of contemporary art. Nurjahan Akhlaq's screen-printed digital collages are pluralistic in nature in their presentation as hanging scrolls and because they juxtapose historical images from the museum's permanent collections with second-hand books from the Anarkali Market in Lahore. Through the use of these eclectic image pairings, Akhlaq develops her own narratives to be interpreted by the viewer. Lastly, Atif Khan's works create a dialogue regarding the history of Islamic print-making by placing an oversized stamp outside the museum and bringing the pattern of that stamp into the exhibition space by presenting four stacks of digital prints of the same pattern for the audience to take away. The work in this exhibition re-presents the misrepresentations of the Muslim world to reveal to the audience its diverse complexity and restores a pluralistic knowledge that is vital to the understanding of Islamic cultures. It also restores and reinvents tradition in showing how contemporary artists create a dialogue between their own cultural and art histories and current artistic practice.

-
1. See Murray Whyte, "PM and Aga Khan Open Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Museum," *The Toronto Star*, 12 Sept. 2014, accessed 24 Nov. 2014.
 2. Whyte.
 3. "Mission," Aga Khan Museum: Aga Khan Development Network, n.d., <https://www.agakhanmuseum.org/node/300>, accessed 24 Nov. 2014.

Excerpt from

Caution and Curiosity: Allegories of Sexual Predation in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves"

By Laura Thippawong

Composed more than a century apart, Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market" (1862) and Angela Carter's short story, "The Company of Wolves" (1979) are parallel works of folkloric literature, similar in motif, but with strikingly dissimilar outlooks. Both works echo the traditional cautionary tale, employing villainous icons from folklore as allegories of a young woman deviating from her prescribed sexual path. The villains, the goblin, and the wolf, are representatives of the Other that stand in opposition to a virginal female child. As embodiments of threat, malicious temptation, and deception, the goblin (or grotesque man), and the anthropomorphized wolf offer clear signals of warning. The tales diverge, however, in the heroine's actions and reactions towards the threat of the sexually aggressive male figure. Rossetti's goblin is a beacon for craving and lust, luring the curious female, Laura, with strange fruit until she gives in to her hunger, only to be plagued by a sense of emptiness as a result. She is redeemed by the

strength and chastity of her sister, Lizzie, her counterpart, with whom she reminisces years later when both are wives and mothers. In this, the consumption of goblins' fruits is a complex metaphor for sex beyond the institution of marriage, and a progressive but lamenting commentary on cultural perceptions of the single and sexual female subject.

While the themes of "Goblin Market" center on temptation and capitulation, Carter's wolf is more aggressive than inviting; he is a "carnivore incarnate" and preys upon the unadulterated child.¹ The traditional gender roles of dominance and submission, hunter and prey, are reconfigured in the final moments of the story with the girl tearing the clothes off the wolf, and bringing him into her bed of her own desire. Carter's re-evaluation of gender roles effectively transcends the typical active and passive roles of the male and female characters, and integrates them into a scenario that allows for the female character to become the subject of her own story. In the end, the female child's actions cause reactions, a subversion of the typically ascribed function in folk and fairytales, in which the female character—protagonist or not—merely reacts to the action and events transpiring around her.

Both stories, although written for adults, exemplify the didactic and moralizing effect of children's fairytales by guiding us along the heroine's journey from naiveté, through danger, and towards self-actualization. With explicitly carnal overtones and emphasis on behavior, ideology, as well as both conscious and unconscious perceptions, "Goblin Market" and "The Company of Wolves" are emblematic of contemporary social concerns regarding

female sexuality. The villain in "Goblin Market" is not the goblin at all, but the mark made by a patriarchal society on the sexualized woman, while "The Company of Wolves" demonstrates the idea of sexual corruption as an illusion, the reality being much more complex and impossible to confine within the boundaries of gender roles.

Through a close reading of "Goblin Market" and "The Company of Wolves," the familiar archetype of the Damsel in Distress—a young and innocent female unaware or unprepared for the trials of her environment—is altered according to the cultural climate in which the narratives were written. From the New Woman in Victorian England, to the rise of feminism in mid-twentieth-century North America, the female protagonists of both stories set off down a similar path, encountering strange or supernatural creatures allegorizing sexual predation both passive and aggressive: one lures while the other hunts. Despite the similarity in motif, however, the heroines' relationships to the male Other and to their understanding of the self-governed body reflect a stark difference in the feminist outlooks prevalent in their historical contexts.

Iconography within folklore has a powerful effect on people's understanding of their cultural identity, and with changes in cultural discourse, archetypes in creative expression change to reflect the cultural perception of the time. Though archetypes in Jungian terms are innate to the psyche and generally consistent in structure, the subtlety of variation over time and the ways in which we perceive them are by no means static. From ancient to contemporary society, folklore and the stories we tell will

continue to evolve, as do social standards. But through the re-interpretations of archetypal and allegorical figures, we can best sense progressive attitudes and turning points within these texts' historical contexts.

-
1. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 110.

Disruptions of Site By Chantelle Hope

As a species, humans have claimed the land through various methods of colonization. *Disruptions of Site* (2015) is a series of eight black and white images of the natural world, which explores the relationship between lived and unlived spaces. Taken at night, these photographs attempt to record how the landscape presents itself to the viewer when free from other human interference.

These environments rely completely on either artificial light created by human activity or on the natural light from the moon to be seen. Ultimately, the images depend on their heavy use of light and shadow to create a juxtaposition between claimed and unclaimed landscapes. Nature is meant to be accessible. With our continuous interaction with nature, humans have destroyed this relationship to the environment by fencing off areas and paving the natural world.









Toward A Definition of New Media Art

By Lex Burgoyne

'New media art' is a term that refers to works that utilize new media technologies in order to access new ways of communicating that might help viewers to understand ourselves and our external worlds. The term 'new media art' emerged during the 1990s, after more specific descriptors like 'digital art,' 'electronic art,' and just 'media art' became common, because 'new media art' welcomed a broader range of media.¹ In his book *Beyond New Media Art*, critic Domenico Quaranta identifies the term's broadness as its most pressing issue. It is difficult to identify what kinds of works fall under the category of new media art because it can encompass a far-reaching and potentially disconnected history of artistic practices; Quaranta notes that some scholars reach as far back as the emergence of the avant-garde as a starting point for the history of new media art. Artist Mark Tribe asserts in his introduction to *New Media Art* that we use new media art to access new ways of communicating and understanding by exploring the cultural, social, aesthetic, and political uses of new media technologies themselves; this exploration is what unifies new media art as a compelling area of study. The words 'new' and 'media,' however, pose further problems

for the term's broadness as they have produced definitional misunderstandings that must be clarified in order to give 'new media art' a more nuanced meaning.

The term 'media' raises an issue as it holds multiple meanings within the field of visual studies. Quaranta turns to both Clement Greenberg and Marshall McLuhan to define the term: Greenberg defines a medium as the irreducible material that is used to create an artwork, while McLuhan defines a medium as "any extension of ourselves," particularly machine technology, such as a light bulb, or the World Wide Web.² Quaranta worries that Greenberg's definition reduces new media art to focusing solely on its works' material properties, overlooking its cultural, social, and political implications. He points to McLuhan's definition as the most appropriate understanding of new media art. It is especially pertinent as McLuhan's emphasis on media as an 'extension' of the human being aligns with Quaranta's search for new means of communicating and understanding.

The term 'new' also poses an issue as the concept of 'newness' will always be relative. A medium that is new cannot maintain that characteristic since as time progresses it will inevitably age (while other media is simultaneously being developed) and be re-labelled as 'old.' In the introduction to his anthology *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Lister draws attention to the fact that 'new' versus 'old' media is often equated with 'digital' versus 'analogue' media. A number of scholars have proven this equivalency to be false by drawing connections between digital and analogue media. Lev Manovich

suggests that Dziga Vertov's 1929 montage film, *Man With A Movie Camera*, is a cinematic, analogue database which is later mirrored by the structure of a computer's digital database; Katherine Hayles draws parallels between the structures of electronic and print hypertext publications (such as wikis and encyclopedias), and addresses how digital and analogue communication exist together on separate levels of software. Some aspects of 'old' media will be seen to reoccur in emerging media as the new, particularly within today's remix culture, rearranges the old. Lister proposes a set of criteria that can be used to evaluate media as 'new,' such as the types of change that they produce for "textual experiences," "ways of representing the world," and "experiences of the relationship between embodiment, identity and community." The defining 'newness' of a 'new' media is, therefore, its ability to incite innovative change in human activity.

New media themselves exist in states of limbo. What defines video games and whether or not they qualify as media art has spurred fights on social networking between triple-A game supporters (such as those made by large companies like Electronic Arts), independent creators, and technology journalists, sometimes to the point of threatening violence. Steve Dietz has cheekily asked, "Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?" pointing to "the debate over whether net art is a unique medium or a medium with distinctive characteristics or a tool like a pencil or not a medium at all or just art or something else or all of the above" as an answer.⁴ As Alois Riegl recognized of the contemporary arts of his own lifetime, when living through

the growth of an artistic phenomenon, we "cannot regard it with the requisite historical and critical distance" for making concrete evaluations of it.⁵ New media art exists in a state of revisionism wherein its capacities as a genre are constantly re-defined as new media artworks are being produced, analyzed, and remixed all at once.

-
1. Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art* (Brescia: Link Editions, 2013), 24.
 2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.
 3. Martin Lister, "New Media and New Technologies," in *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Lister, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 12-13.
 4. Steve Dietz, "Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?" *Web Walker* 28 (April 23, 2000) http://www.walkerart.org/gallery9/webwalker/ww_042300_main.html.
 5. Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, trans. Jacqueline E. Jung (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 100.

Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects:
Trade, Cultural Imperialism, and Western Influence
in 19th-century China
By Annie Xu

Countless rows of objects are enclosed in tall glass cases in the East Asian section of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). As you walk deeper and deeper, past the aisles of porcelain vases, Buddhist figures, calligraphy, serving plates, and tiny bottles, you eventually reach a small room displaying artifacts presented as part of the “Made in China” exhibition, a selection of objects featuring hybrid patterns and crossbred styles that include exquisite works in porcelain, stamp work, and painting. One of these paintings, *Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects* (mid-19th century) does not bring aesthetic fulfillment for the visual sense, but appears strictly technical, casually composed, and unmoving. There is no drama, apart from the giant spider stretching its sharp legs around its prey in an attempt to conquer it.

Although created by an unknown Chinese artist in the mid-nineteenth century, the painting does not employ the stylistic conventions of traditional nationalist Chinese painting, but rather communicates a hybrid identity that reflects the changes brought about by trade, imperialism,

and cultural influence between the West and China at that time. Initially, China had extremely limited communication with other areas of the world. Only in 1757 did Emperor Qianlong allow Western merchants to trade with China, but only in Canton, a small port of the Concession District.¹ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, Chinese overseas trade had seen an enormous expansion.² This change in rates of export indicates a larger appetite on the part of the Western market for Chinese items, and a desire to find out more about this “exotic” empire.

Pith paper painting played a significant role in satisfying this appetite. Pith, the spongy inner tissue of a small tree, was the inexpensive alternative paper source used solely for Chinese export paintings.³ Sliced from *tetrapanax papyrifera*, trees native to the uplands of southwestern China and Taiwan, it was easy to transport the material to Canton, and unlike in the complicated process of paper-making, the sheets would be ready to use as soon as they dried.⁴ Additionally, pith paper came in small sheets of seven to eight inches in length, which made them perfect as small souvenirs for sailors and traders who arrived at the port.

With the increase in demand for small souvenirs from China, pith paintings required more efficient modes and speeds of production. Pith paper paintings were therefore “produced in studios, often by teams of jobbing craftsmen in a production line under the direction of a recognized artist.”⁵ The artists who created copies of pith paper paintings for export were not recognized in the final work, and

by the late twentieth century, the Chinese artist's shop label was completely eliminated from such works.⁶ It is for this reason that the ROM's *Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects* does not include the artist's name anywhere on the painting. Trade with the West had not only reduced the value of the workers responsible for the creation of these works, but also gave further insight into Western colonialist ambitions.

Generally, art critics in the West did not receive Chinese art well. While there were people, such as John R. Peters and Nathan Dunn, who established exclusive museums for Chinese art, many would not give up the idea of Western artistic superiority. One critic wrote, "We do not mean to compare Chinese painting with the works of European Masters, or the productions of our own artists, for the purpose of claiming equality for them. This would be preposterous."⁷ Even the publisher of Dunn's catalogue praised Chinese artists "for their correctness in line and for the beauty and brilliance of colour in painting all aspects of nature," but nonetheless believed Chinese art could not "attain the perfection in the fine arts achieved by enlightened Christians."⁸ The Western public enjoyed Chinese art as exotic tourist items, but imagined Chinese culture as permanently living in an historical time period, unable to move forward, while Western culture was racing towards the future. As a result, Chinese artists withheld their best works from export, disdaining the Western ignorance of their artistic value.⁹

The Western arrogance continued as they pushed for a change in Chinese painting style. Under the pressure of

Darwinism and scientific exploration, there was a strong desire for accuracy in art. The West believed only accurate depictions of nature were considered valuable, and did not appreciate "houses placed one on top of another, and the method which [Chinese artists] have imagined to express objects at a distance," which they believed "offended every rule of perspective."¹⁰ As a result, Western collectors romanticized themselves as missionaries and sent botanists to Canton, to teach Chinese painters how to depict insects "accurately" in perspective.¹¹ Thus, Chinese artists ironically pursued Western ideals of accuracy to keep up with the demand for "Chinese" art.

The application of colour and illustration style of *Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects* is dramatically different from traditional Chinese paintings. No longer using light layers of paint and thin, intricate lines to depict botany and the arthropod, the painting uses dark shady colours to illustrate the insects, emphasizing anatomical accuracy. The only challenge to Western perspectival ideals is the exaggerated size of the spider. As she is unable to follow her own idea of beauty, the artist's composition is scattered and haphazard. The pith paper paintings did not communicate the aesthetic ideals of Chinese cultural values, but reflected the effects of trade with the West. From a short-term perspective, the massive export of cheap paintings was beneficial to the Chinese economy, but the cheap paintings made for export never matched the quality of expensive ceramics or traditional Chinese art. Instead, they reflected more about the West's self-righteous attitude of its exceptionalism. Even today, an uneasy conclusion could

be made that such values in the West are still held about Chinese manufactured goods: the great effort expended to produce cheap export items made for Western standards and tastes parallels the impact of trade, imperialism, and cultural influence on nineteenth-century Chinese art, as demonstrated in *Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects*.

Excerpt from

The Sublime and the Limits of Delimiting

By Sylvia Evans

-
1. Margrit Reuss, Pauline J. Marchand, and Nico Lingbeek, “Made in China’—techniques when approaching the conservation of three china trade paintings,” *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 37.2 (May 2014): 120-35, 122.
 2. Ifan Williams, “Beauty in pursuit of pleasure,” *Apollo* 164 (November 2006): 58-65, 58.
 3. Ifan Williams, “Tea, pith, and monkey business,” *Antiques* 173.1 (January 2008): 184-193, 185.
 4. Williams, “Tea, pith, and monkey business,” 186.
 5. Williams, “Beauty in pursuit of pleasure,” 60.
 6. Karina Corrigan, “Chinese Botanical Paintings for the Export Market,” *Antiques* 165.6 (June 2004), 98.
 7. Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting objects—excluding people: Chinese subjects and American visual culture, 1830-1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 34.
 8. Metrick-Chen 34.
 9. Metrick-Chen 35.
 10. Metrick-Chen 27.
 11. Caption for “Pith Paper Painting Showing Insects” (mid-19th century), ROM East Asian Collection.

Immanuel Kant describes the sublime as “an object (of nature), *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature’s inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas.*”¹ Here he describes a moment in which the human mind has been confronted by something in nature that does not conform to one of the pre-existing concepts in one’s faculty of understanding, thus the faculty of reason experiences an inability, or at least a delay, in producing an acceptable inference or comprehension of said object. For Kant this might mean an erupting volcano, a whiteout blizzard, the vastness of the open ocean, or the immensity of the universe. What results is an experience of anxiety or agitation, bordering on terror, as the mind tries to cognize the immensity of what one is facing. However, our supersensible faculty of reason allows us to triumph over this uncertainty through the application of the principle of totality (in the case of the mathematical sublime), or through the recognition of man’s mastery over nature (in the case of the dynamic sublime).² In the former, reason holds that regardless of whether or not we have a specific concept

to categorize what we are confronted with, or whether or not something appears too large to fathom, everything has boundaries; everything can be delimited. In the latter, the act of realizing the awful power of the natural world reminds us that we are separate from that world and have the ability to keep ourselves from that danger, because, as the Industrial Revolution had shown to Kant, man dominates the natural world, not the other way around. However, Kant is careful to point out that the object itself does not possess sublimity but rather inspires sublimity in the mind of the beholder. For Kant, “the sublime consists merely in a *relation*, for here we judge the sensible in the presentation of nature to be suitable for a possible supersensible use.”³ In other words, the sublime exists within the supersensible faculty of reason, through its ability to impose boundaries and to dominate that which was previously perceived as incomprehensible.

Jean-Francois Lyotard’s conception of the sublime in art, on the other hand, can be seen to be a “reworking” of Kant’s description of the sublime in nature.⁴ Where Kant’s sublimity came from the mind’s ability to cognize something incomprehensible, for Lyotard, the sublime in art is “that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible ... the paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to witness.”⁵ His essay, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde” centres on the idea of indeterminacy, and the difficulty of defining and analyzing the moment we call “now.” Before one can ask a question about what is happening, it has, by necessity, already happened, and by this logic is no longer

“now.” The assumption here is that something always will happen, because that is the way the world works. But that is the way the world works because we have decided to understand the world in this manner: it becomes a rather cyclical logic. For art, this means that we see art history, and the unfolding of different movements within it, as a linear trajectory over time with one movement leading to the next, all connected by some sort of artistic narrative. The avant-garde artist, however, seeks to disrupt this narrative and to cause a rift in the traditional concept of progress being merely that which moves *forward*. Avant-garde artists in the postmodern era seek to question the very meaning of progress and the perception of time. For Lyotard, they are posing the question, “what if *nothing* happens?”⁶

The idea of nothing happening next is antithetical to the human desire for reason and order in a structured society. The anxiety caused by facing the unknown future in the 1990s is akin to Kant’s description of facing the immensity and power of nature in the 1790s. However, where Kant wanted us to use our reason to overcome this unknown in favour of order and peace of mind, Lyotard is asking us to let go of the human obsession with grand narratives in favour of embracing the sublimity of indeterminacy. In Kant’s era, the concept of time would have been one of those abstract notions that is far too immense for the human mind to sufficiently grasp it, thus we have used our supersensible faculty of reason to frame it in a way that allows us to feel as though we have control over what happens. In the postmodern era, the inherent

indeterminacy of time itself is the thing that causes a sublime experience.

What I hope I have adequately expressed thus far, is both the intimate connection and the inherent points of diversion between Kant and Lyotard's descriptions of the sublime. When Kant was writing, the human capacity for reason was being treated as something that was infallible, following an historical narrative about human mastery of and domination over nature (and that which is non-human in general). Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment used the idea of the sublime to enforce this narrative. Lyotard, on the other hand, was writing in the cynical, skeptical postmodern period where it was the norm to question everything, including the limits of human comprehension. Since the time of Lyotard's writing, it has become increasingly clear that there are limits to our so-called supersensible faculty; the experience of the post-modern sublime that Lyotard describes reminds us of that. The problem that I am trying to reconcile then becomes the paradox of reading the shift in the meaning of the sublime over time as a seemingly linear progression, while also agreeing with Lyotard's call for the rejection of overarching narratives. It would seem to me that while calling for a disruption in accepted narratives is a useful exercise, it does not change the fact that the concept of the sublime has its own narrative. Or maybe it does, and I am just too entrenched in Western modes of thinking to see it.

1. Immanuel Kant, "General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments" in *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987): 267-278, 268.
2. Supersensible describes an experience that surpasses what our regular senses, such as sight and hearing, can process. For Kant, reason must be trusted beyond mere sensation. Here, and throughout the essay, I employ the term "man" to describe the universal, rational subject to nod to the way Kantian philosophy (like much Enlightenment thinking) implicitly assumed a male subject position as the norm.
3. Kant 267.
4. Diarmuid Costello, "Lyotard's Modernism," *Parallax* 6:4 (2000): 76-87, 77.
5. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991): 89-108, 93.
6. Lyotard 99.

Contributors

LEX BURGOYNE is a second-year student in the Visual and Critical Studies BA program at OCAD University. They are interested in new media art, with a penchant for games. Their work can be found at lexb.ca.

SYLVIA EVANS is a third-year student in the Visual and Critical Studies BA program at OCAD University. She is interested in the intersections of art history, philosophy, and critical theory and the insights they provide into contemporary issues of existing in the world today.

CHANTELLE HOPE is a fourth-year student in the Visual and Critical Studies BA program. Her work focuses on photography, specifically theory and criticism and blending writing and studio practices as an active fine art photographer.

WON JEON is a second-year student at OCAD University, majoring in the BA Honours program in Visual and Critical Studies, with a minor in Sustainability. Her academic interests lie in twentieth-century intellectual history and aesthetics, particularly in conversations between Canadian poetry, philosophy, and environmental phenomenology.

LAURA THIPPHAWONG is completing her fourth and final year at OCAD University and is graduating with an Honours BA in Visual and Critical Studies. As a self-taught artist prior to coming to OCAD, she has exhibited her work in group and solo exhibitions throughout Toronto. She plans to continue her studies in graduate school and devote her career to research, writing, and art practice.

MAYA WILSON-SANCHEZ is an emerging writer, curator and artist. She is currently a third-year Visual and Critical Studies student at OCAD University. Maya is an Ada Slaight scholar and interested in writing about art, social change, science, language, and gender through an emphasis on meta-discourse and ontologies of being.

ANNIE XU is a first-year student in the Visual and Critical Studies BA program. Her essay emerged from her interests in the interaction of different cultures in processes of globalization. Also skilled in Graphic Design, she intends to exercise her understanding in both areas in her future pursuits.

Thesis Abstracts

Graduating students in the Visual and Critical Studies BA Honours program at OCAD U have the opportunity to research and produce a major research paper in their final year of study. The projects completed by our first graduating cohort reflect the diversity of topics and wide range of perspectives that are possible through a global approach to the study of art history.

Moon-Kyoung (Melody) Cho
EXPRESSIVITY OF SUPERFLAT: FLAT, SYNCRETIC,
AND TRANSFORMATIVE
Supervisor: Soyang Park

“Superflat” is a theory about a particular aesthetic sensibility that Takashi Murakami has observed to be prevalent in contemporary Japanese cultural scenes, especially in manga, anime, and the production and consumption of cute and/or erotic objects. By indiscriminately gathering various works that feature this aesthetic, Murakami produced influential exhibitions that have charmed the art world, both within Japan and internationally. While one may interpret superflat artworks simply as “strange yet fascinating eye candy” that sells Japan’s “unique” cultural identity in the global art market, this is an insufficient interpretation that does not look deeper than their apparently trivial look on the surface. My thesis offers another interpretation that looks at “superflat” as a project through

which Murakami intended to re-think otaku culture and thereby transform the social and cultural environment of contemporary Japan.

I interpret superflat artworks as self-caricatures of current Japan being unraveled by (otaku) artists. Murakami believes that they expose a sense of hopelessness that is an undercurrent in Japanese society today, and at the same time, express resistance. He hopes that they will be a catalyst for a change in Japanese society. His project, of course, has not been without criticisms, with some predicting a failure and the end of superflat in recent years. I argue, however, that the strength of superflat lies in its ability to syncretize visual, social, and cultural elements indiscriminately, both from the past and in the present, potentially into ever-new expressions; and it is this irreducible expressivity of superflat that makes the future of superflat more anticipated than the end.

Robert Oswald
IT IS, AS IT IS, NOT: ABSTRACTION AND
MATERIAL NECESSITY IN ART AND SOCIETY
Supervisor: Charles Reeve

The absurdity of this paper should be noted from the outset. Recognizing Alfred Korzybski’s profound statement, “the map is not the territory,” as the catalyst for investigation here, my thesis aims to elucidate that falling outside the map’s boundaries: the indeterminate and incommensurable nature of nature. Examining the intersection of aesthetics and politics in the context of ecological crisis, this text

explores our physical reality as one existing prior to and beyond the separation and abstraction necessary for human language, knowledge, and communication—outside the control of any supposedly totalizing human systems based on abstracted models. Simply put, this paper asks: what can art do here? The answer: it can frame a space of explicit ambiguity with potentially limitless affordances beyond the limitations of fragmented language, prescribed mental models, and conventional modes of experience. In this space of foundational uncertainty, abstracted perceptual categories can converge with experiential recognition of the physical world's dynamic change and variation, and our place within it. Examining the convergent literary and cultural production of John Cage and Guy Debord, the works under consideration here, like this paper, aim to facilitate a process of showing seeing—bearing witness to the indeterminate and navigating the unknown—explored here to reveal and degrade the treacherous notion of human dominion.

Laura Thippawong

DEATH SYMBOLISM AND WAYS OF SEEING
THE OTHER: THE DOCILE MAIDEN, THE
MAD SCIENTIST, AND MORBID EROTICISM IN
GABRIEL VON MAX'S *THE ANATOMIST*

Supervisor: Ryan Whyte

The Anatomist by Gabriel von Max (1869) illustrates a long-standing fascination with a variety of ways in which we encounter the Other. My thesis explores the Other as

contrasted between the living and dead, anatomist and cadaver, female and male, and dominant and submissive. Here, erotic death symbolism and the Death and the Maiden motif—popularized in Renaissance Europe and revived during the Romantic era—are portrayed in tandem with issues surrounding medical culture in nineteenth-century central Europe. The sociopolitical climate of surgical and psychological advancements brought about the scientific basis for constructing oppositions of gender and sexual deviance versus normality. I argue that Max's studies in parapsychology and Darwinism affected this work by encapsulating the uncanniness of death and the secular body, and that the history of sex in Western culture, especially regarding fetishism, can be viewed as an allegorical element in his painted figures.

The first BA Annual publication celebrates the work of current and graduating students in OCAD University's first Bachelor of Arts (BA) Honours program in Visual and Critical Studies. Comprising critical essays, exhibition reviews, artist portfolios, and creative non-fiction, the inaugural volume reflects the innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to art history and visual culture that are at the core of this unique program.

Visual and Critical Studies BA Honours program
www.ocadu.ca/academics/undergraduate/visual-critical-studies

Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences
and School of Interdisciplinary Studies

OCAD University
100 McCaul Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5T 1W1

