

Special section editorial

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Political oppression has been experienced in many parts of the world, notably through colonialism in Africa, India and South America, as well as socialist oppression in Central and Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of regime changes in many of these geographies, there is a shared move towards art practices articulating Post-Colonial or Post-Socialist identities. Such identities are in turn often related to culturally informed notions of place existing in the social imaginary, in representational discourse or in lived interactions with places. Using comparable strategies, and often working with intersecting concerns across geographies, artists who work with notions of place might actively counter or interrogate historic understandings of the contexts they engage with. Such artistic practices could also be seen as an attempt to create an “authentic” expression of national belonging, responding to the problematic residue of cultural objects, images and ideologies perpetuated (or retained) in a Post-Colonial/Post-Socialist milieu.

This special section of *Image and Text* developed from a panel held at the British Association of Art History Conference in April 2021, chaired by ourselves, Karen von Veh and Landi Raubenheimer. The panel and the papers selected for this journal section reflect research that specifically engages with notions of place, landscape, or site, and that critically respond to the visual legacies inherited from oppressive regimes.

Published by



The first four articles engage the contested nature of land; dealing with notions of place, land, and territory, but also with the representation of landscape in various media; often photography, but also painting, and the interaction between places and public art or land art. There is thus a theme of ambivalence around land ownership, and the histories of land subjected to political trauma, that emerges from these contributions. In these four

Original Research

Challenging legacies in Post-Colonial and Post-Socialist notions of place

articles the representation of place is important – whether that is through the portrayal of a political figure, or through photographs of embattled sites, attempts to reconstruct visual histories through performance and photography, or by turning to seemingly universal themes such as displacement or sacred space – representations of place in these instances seek to problematise, or at times construct, notions of place, of belonging, and of history as an ongoing project in addressing traumas around these notions.

The first article, by Brenda Schmahmann, Vineet Thakur and Peter Vale, addresses the problematics of a monument that is associated with a history of settlement and colonialism. As the authors point out, the Karel Landman Monument is further complicated by controversy surrounding the current understanding of past ideologies that inform the monument. This is a rich and detailed study that engages with the changing interpretations of historic imaginaries that appear contrary to contemporary ideas of nationhood in South Africa.

The second paper takes us to land claims and activism around Native American land dispossession. Here Scout Hutchinson examines ideological connections between Land Art or earthworks of the 1960s and 70s and the wave of Native American rights activism and the Red Power Movement that occurred around the same time. The issues of displacement, territorial borders, and trespassing that emerge in earthworks is reassessed in the light of Red Power activists' interrogation of broken historic treaties and demands for the return of stolen lands.

In the third essay we move from colonialism in Africa and America to the colonising of Scotland by the British. The paper by Alex Boyd addresses this topic within the wider context of the British Empire. Looking at artists from the nineteenth century onwards, he examines multi-disciplinary methodologies for critically engaging with sites of trauma and militarism within an alternative Post-Colonial context.

The fourth article in this issue is concerned with white masculinity in relation to the colonial legacies of monuments and landscape representation in South Africa. Here we, Karen von Veh and Landi Raubenheimer, investigate two engagements with Tshwane's heritage sites in the work of artists Paul Emmanuel and Avant Car Guard. In both instances we identify dialogical strategies in how these artists engage with existing places that are important in apartheid history. We consider how these artists adopt anti-monumental and parodic approaches to subvert and reframe notions of land, landscape and belonging in their work.

In addition to a focus on land, the last three articles consider aspects of nationalisms. Discussion in these papers engages with the way nationalisms and/or identities inform how artists and people think about places and landscapes. They demonstrate how

problematic historic hegemonies are subverted by artists in the aftermath of particular regimes and their violent or suppressive legacies.

The first article in this section engages with the widespread politicisation of the Europa and the Bull myth in the European Union (EU), and shows how contemporary Greek artists have critiqued this development. Themis Veleni considers the work of several artists who extrapolate on the 'in-between' quality of the myth, which she argues has been exploited by the EU to construct a 'unified' sense of identity across the EU states. Artists discussed in this paper use the myth to consider the implications of the EU for Greek identities, and portray it in various permutations that question the rhetoric employed by the EU.

Julia Tikhonova considers the reimagining of Russia in a 'Post-Soviet' context where people are juggling Post-Colonial discourses, the circulation of nationalisms, Soviet nostalgia, and a religious upsurge. She questions the aptness of the term 'Post' within a Russian context. She then considers films and installations made by prominent artists, Anton Vidokle and Arseny Zhilyaev, who attempt to come to terms with this ideological and cultural turmoil by imagining utopian futures, framed by the outdated nineteenth century ideology of Cosmism.

The last article in this issue is concerned with queer identity in Cyprus. Elena Parpa argues that contemporary Cypriot artists Krista Papista and Hasan Aksaygin engage with the complexities of Cypriot society by employing tactics of 'queer use'. These artists make spaces and landscapes of cohesion or discord visible through their work, and in this manner draw attention to the divided nature of Cyprus' society, as well as the neglected place of queer identity in this context.

The diversity of these papers is linked by the thematic importance of landscape for a sense of identity and belonging. These papers show how artists have used the landscape and symbols of place and nationhood, such as flags and motifs from visual culture, to engage with what a place is and question what it should be in the aftermath of difficult histories. The work of artists who engage with notions of landscape and place is particularly relevant in contexts of post-trauma, such as Post-Colonial and Post-Socialist settings, as they labour to imagine new identities, nations and communities, but also new landscapes and human relations to landscapes. Ultimately, artists in different places respond to these challenges in unique ways, but there are surprising, shared strategies and responses to the aftermath of trauma that come to light in these diverse articles. As is evident in these papers, an emphasis on the importance of place in relation to political histories may draw out lesser-known histories and the work of artists may be situated within the larger context of post-traumatic notions of place, revealing new insights into how artists respond to historical inequalities and unfolding geopolitics.