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Dear Reader,

We the editors of *Ink and Image* are delighted to offer you this year’s publication. This year’s submissions showed an amazing amount of talent in the students of CAS, and we are pleased to be bringing you a diverse range of essays spanning a vast scope of time, media, and areas of interest.

This edition of Ink and Image contains four essays covering a wide range of topics and mediums. This year’s journal includes subjects ranging from the ancient architecture of Palmyra to video games at the 2014 Whitney Biennial. We are confident in telling you that all our authors have demonstrated exceptional skill and research in their work, and we are proud to be including them in this year’s publication. We regret being unable to include the other excellent submissions, and hope to include more in the future as Ink and Image continues to grow.

We are glad to have the opportunity to thank Professor Krinsky, *Ink and Image*’s faculty advisor, Professor Geronimus, the Chair of the Art History Department, and Anqi Xu, Barron Brocksmith, and Sarah Lubin, the editors of the previous issue. *Ink and Image* could not have been produced without the great amount of help they all provided. We would also like to thank Dean of the College of Arts and Science, G. Gabrielle Starr who has given *Ink and Image* tremendous amounts of essential support this year.

We hope that you enjoy this year’s publication and look forward to next year’s Ink and Image.

Happy Reading!

Grace, Sabrina, & Sarah
Landscapes as Cross-dressing: An Analysis of Lin Xue’s Paintings
Anqi Xu

Before the Manchu troops nailed the coffin of the great Ming, Lin Xue 林雪 (courtesy name Tiansu 天素; dates unknown) was one of the most famous painters of courtesans in southern China during the first half of the seventeenth century. A native of Fujian province, Lin displayed an exceptional talent in art and acquired stardom in Hangzhou, a center of urban life and hedonistic pleasures. What distinguished Lin from other courtesan artists of her day was her unusual dedication to and command of landscape paintings, a genre that most female painters avoided in their practice. By adopting the aesthetics of the male literati, the artist coats her paintings with a scholar’s taste and presence. This presence contrasts with Lin’s identity as a female painter, allowing her to perform “cross-dressing” in the territory of art and to invoke a striking gender paradox.

The predominance of landscape paintings in Lin Xue’s oeuvre underlines her commitment to and mastery of this pictorial genre. Despite the scarcity of the artist’s extant works, almost all of her fewer-than-ten catalogued paintings are landscapes, in the form of handscrolls, hanging scrolls, and fans.¹ These paintings strongly contrast with the plethora of

¹I found nine paintings attributed to Lin Xue, six of which are landscapes:
1. Landscape (fan painting, the Palace Museum): the Palace Museum database ;
2. Landscape (hanging scroll, the Shanghai Museum): Zhongguo Gudai Shuhua Tumu, volume 4 (Hn 1-1714, unillustrated);
3. The Guanyin Bodhisattva (hanging scroll, the Nantong Museum) Id., volume 6 (J 8-063, p. 222);
4. Wild geese and Marsh (fan painting, the Capital Museum): Id., volume 1 (Jing 5-280, unillustrated);
5. Forest in Snow (hanging scroll, the Zhejiang Provincial Museum): Id., volume 11 (Zhe 1-149, p. 60);
6. Wild Geese and Marsh (hanging scroll, the Smithsonian Institution) (fig.11): Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912, p. 25;
7. Landscape (fan painting, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Dubosc Collection): Id., p. 94;
8. Landscape (fan painting, Chengxun Tang Collection) (fig. 1): Id., p. 95;
floral, figural, and religious images created by Lin’s female peers. Contemporary writings prove the singularity of Lin’s approach. As the Ming painter and scholar Zhuo Fazhi 梓發之 indicates in his book *Lu Li Ji* 渌籬集,

當今林天素畫極超逸，自是倪元鎮，黃子久一流人。嘗與玄宰先生言，詩至薛洪度，畫至天素，具有名士風流。然詩女尚可多得，古來閨秀稍工蘭竹耳，能為山水逸格者，從來未有。

Now Lin Tiansu’s paintings disclose an extraordinary sense of transcendence; she is an equal to Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang. I used to converse with Dong Qichang, who commented that the poems commensurate with those by Xue Tao and the paintings with those by Tiansu inherit the legacy of esteemed scholars. While female poets are many, with boudoirs from the ancient time a realm of painting orchids, bamboos, and such, there has not been any [woman] who could evoke the transcendent character of landscapes [as adequately as Tiansu].

Zhuo’s writing demonstrates not only Lin Xue’s expertise in landscape paintings, but also her accomplishments in mastering this genre as a woman. Emphasizing the absence of female artists in the arena of landscape paintings, he places Lin in the lineage of Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301 – 1374) and Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269 – 1354), the eminent Yuan masters that male literati of the Ming period sought to emulate. By virtue of this lineage, Lin Xue’s almost unprecedented dedication to landscape paintings ascribes her to a gender group outside her own. The line of female artists was insufficient to accommodate her practice, which allowed Lin to bridge gender boundaries, and become a new paragon for female painters.

Two factors may have facilitated Lin Xue’s practice of landscape paintings — first, her travels between Fujian and Hangzhou; and second, her identity as a courtesan and her close connections with leading male artists of her time. These factors granted Lin Xue access

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to natural sceneries and opportunities to develop her landscape painting skills, respectively. In fact, nature’s inaccessibility to women induced female artists’ eschewal of the theme. As Li Shi suggests, the seclusion of women in the inner chambers prohibited them from traveling and painting from life. This seclusion stifled their desire to depict landscapes, and even if their desire persisted, the domestic space would provide them with little inspiration to portray scenes of the external world.\(^3\) Nature, in other words, was distant to most female artists, despite the fashion for landscape paintings among contemporary male painters. Another factor that discouraged women from depicting landscapes or even from painting in general was the longstanding code of female ethics that prized women’s humility. According to Li, while art could enhance male scholars’ self-cultivation, paintings — especially landscapes whose completion requires tremendous effort — could inculcate women with flagrant demonstrations of their skills and techniques.\(^4\) These demonstrations would inflate female artists’ egos and compromise their moral integrity, thus prompting women to destroy their artistic creations as an expression of virtue.\(^5\)

Lin Xue partly overcame these limitations by way of her travels and her social freedom as a courtesan. In her lifetime, Lin traveled on at least two major journeys—one arriving in Hangzhou and one returning to Fujian in 1620.\(^6\) Although no records seem to indicate the paths that Lin might have taken, these travels would have exposed her to an immense world beyond her boudoirs—the world of mountains, rivers, hills, and lakes. This exposure to natural scenery may have cultivated Lin’s perennial fascination with nature and catalyzed her painting of landscapes, perhaps to mirror her personal experiences.

While her travels could have stimulated her depiction of landscapes, Lin’s identity as a courtesan and her connections with the preeminent male artists of late Ming period also critically affected her paintings. Therefore, it was her social freedom as a courtesan that mainly contributed to the development of her artistic style. According to Li Shi, most female painters at this time came from three backgrounds—artists’ families, elite clans, and

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\(^3\) Li, Shi. Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu 明清閨閣繪畫研究 [Analysis of ‘Boudoir Paintings’ during the Ming and Qing period] (Beijing: Gugong chuban she, 2008), p. 140.

\(^4\) Li, Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu, p. 15.

\(^5\) Li indicates that women artists from the elite class and artists’ families indeed sought to separate themselves from courtesan painters. In the case of the late Ming women artists Fang Weiyi 方維儀 and Fu Daocun 傅道坤, Lady Fu abandoned painting to observe the code of female ethics, while Lady Fang even destroyed her works lest their spread outside the inner chambers. Li, Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu, pp. 13 - 14.

brothels. Unlike members of the first two groups, who were consistently concerned with the fall from grace, Lin belonged to the third class, thus remaining unsujeetible to the code of decorum. She could practice art for the very purpose of demonstrating her skills, thereby forging a wider reputation, attracting more clients, and selling her paintings for higher profits. She could also engage with male clients in the public domain in defiance of the gender segregation enforced by the seventeenth-century frame of ethics.

In particular, Lin Xue’s ongoing interactions with male artists could have contributed to her artistic education. As Li Shi suggests, courtesan artists usually received their first training in the arts from madams who managed brothels. If a madam indeed laid the ground of Lin Xue’s artistic practice, it is highly possible that Lin polished her skills by learning from male artists of her social circle. One male painter who exercised a significant influence over Lin Xue was Dong Qichang (1555 – 1636), the most important artist and art theorist of late Ming period. This influence is evident in the visibility of Dong’s styles and ideologies in Lin’s oeuvre. A major strand of Dong’s thought was his emphasis on fang, the imitation of the hand of old masters. Dong himself created a large group of paintings after the styles of his so-called “southern school,” which consists of eminent literati painters in history like Dong Yuan (934 – 962), Ju Ran (dates unknown), and Huang Gongwang. By tracing Lin Xue’s artistic lineage, her paintings reveal a profound knowledge about the same set of artists, in addition to a high familiarity with Dong Qichang’s own practice.

Lin’s fan painting Landscape (1642) illustrates this knowledge and familiarity (Figure 1). This painting portrays a serene scene and exudes an air of poetic tranquility. As rocks in the foreground anchor the overall image, houses in the middle ground hint at human residence within the lush nature, while mountains in the background overlook rivers and trees at their feet. Lin endows the central peak with a light contour, yet applies repeated strokes to evoke the solidity of the mountain form. The origins of the strokes can be

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7 Li, Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu, pp. 18 – 44.
8 As Wu Jianguo and Fu Xianglong indicate, Lin Xue’s paintings were in high demand in the late Ming market, whereas her close male associates might not be able to make the same fortune. Wu Jianguo and Fu Xianglong, “Wang Ranming yu wanning caishu jiaoyou kaolun,” p. 40.
9 Li, Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu, p. 162.
10 While Dong Qichang possibly offered the most crucial influence over Lin Xue’s style, according to Li Na, the artist who taught Lin early in her career was Xu Shijun (dates unknown), a painter and drama author in Hangzhou. Li, Na, “Wan Ming mingji huajia Lin Xue xihu youzong ji chuanguo kao [Studies of the Late Ming Courtesan Artist Lin Xue’s Travel Itineraries near the West Lake and Her Creations],” Xin meishi 7 (2014): 52 – 61, p. 54.
Figure 1. Xue, Lin. *Landscape*. 1642. Fan, ink on gold paper. Chengxun Tang Collection.
traced back to Dong Yuan and Ju Ran’s works. In Dong Yuan’s *Xiao and Xiang Rivers* and Ju Ran’s *Seeking the Tao in Autumn Mountains* (fig. 3), the artists opt for a density of brush traces instead of ink washes to create subtle shadings. This density reduces the individuality of each stroke and merges one with another, thereby forging a continuous tonal transition. Inspired by, but differing from typical archetypes, the repeated strokes in Lin Xue’s landscapes appear much more discrete, possessing stronger tonal variations and individual presence. They show similarities to Huang Gongwang’s and Dong Qichang’s innovative brush traces that emerged from the two earlier painters’ styles. In Huang Gongwang’s *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (1349 – 1351) and Dong Qichang’s *Landscape after the Style of Huang Gongwang* (1611), both artists continue the use of repeated brushstrokes for shading, yet decrease the number of their strokes. As a result, each stroke has much more clarity and visibility, which evokes not only the volume of the mountains, but also their crisp edges. Huang’s and Dong’s approaches paved the way for Lin’s artistic idiosyncrasy. Compared to their brush traces in the two aforementioned paintings, Lin Xue’s repeated strokes are thicker and more interconnected, interweaving with each other and knitting every short line of the brush traces into the overall tonality of the mountains. The resulting image pinpoints Lin Xue’s landscape to the ground between the earlier painters’ practices and the later artists’ adaptations. While Lin’s varied brushstrokes align with those in Huang Gongwang’s and Dong Qichang’s paintings, the artist’s attempt to expand the width of each stroke and to interlace one brush trace with another endows her painting with antique aesthetics. This comparison between the four male painters’ works and Lin Xue’s painting demonstrates that Lin absorbed her predecessors’ styles and skillfully adapted them to her needs.

Occupying a large portion of the artist’s oeuvre and demonstrating her study of literati paintings, Lin Xue’s landscapes deserve attention not only because of their preponderance in number but also because of their merits. While Lin’s travels and her social freedom as a courtesan might have encouraged her creation of landscape paintings, these two factors are insufficient to account for the artist’s unusual passion for this pictorial genre. In fact, a group of courtesan painters from late Ming period had similar experiences to Lin Xue’s – for example Xue Susu (active 1573 – 1620)—and yet few committed themselves to landscape paintings. According to Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, apart from her identity as a courtesan painter, Xue was an outstanding horseback markswoman

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31 I am referring here specifically to Huang’s and Dong’s brush traces in these two paintings, since the artists’ oeuvres evidence their adoption of various artistic styles. For example, in Dong’s landscape album mentioned in this essay, the artist not only adopted the style of Huang Gongwang but also followed that of Mi Youren 李友仁 (1051 – 1107), a prominent literati painter of the Northern Song period.
who considered herself a female knight-errant.\textsuperscript{12} The subjects of her paintings are varied, encompassing landscapes, figures, and flora, with her most famous works being depictions of orchids and bamboos. On the one hand, these plants were longstanding emblems of literati moral fiber, favored by the artists’ scholar clientele; on the other hand, they were relatively simple motifs to create.\textsuperscript{13}

Lin Xue’s dedication to landscape paintings was therefore exceptional not only among women painters from artists’ families and elite clans but also among those from brothels. That is, the artist’s practice was unusual among women painters of other social status as well as that of her own. Lin followed the vogue of landscape paintings with male artists and proclaimed her proficiency in this esteemed genre. Her idiosyncratic style underlined the artist’s audacity and ambition to indulge herself in a pictorial tradition alien to most members of her gender and class. In this way, by adopting landscapes as her main subject and by following literati masters’ styles, Lin coated her paintings with a scholar’s presence, as if she performed “cross-dressing” in the territory of art.

The concept of cross-dressing was integral to the consciousness of Lin Xue’s contemporaries. Not only did society hold an open attitude towards women cross-dressing as men, but this practice was also a popular theme in literature and theatre. As Roland Altenburger indicates,

\begin{quote}
The question of gender hierarchy is crucial to our understanding of female-to-male cross-dressing and male attitudes towards them. Female-to-male dressing up was perceived as dressing “up,” as an upgrading in social status, and hence a willful transgression toward more power and freedom.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Altenburger underlines the significance of gender hierarchy in steering the social attitudes toward cross-dressing. Because of men’s preconceived privilege over women, masculinity became not only a quality by birth but also an attribute of desire. It could be something “borrowed” by women, with the logic behind it a natural impulse for aiming higher. As a result, society was more lenient towards women’s practice of cross-dressing than the reverse.

The popularity of this theme in seventeenth-century literature and theatre testifies to

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\textsuperscript{13} Li, Mínqīng guìhuā yùhuìhua, p. 164.
the social acceptance of female cross-dressing. According to Altenburger, an example of this popularity is the beloved story of Zhu Yingtaï 祝英台, a maiden who attends school in the disguise of a man and falls in love with her schoolmate Liang Shanbo 梁山伯. Even though the narrative climaxes in the tragic death of the two protagonists, Zhu is portrayed as a respectable woman. Her cross-dressing is not a scandalous behavior, but rather demonstration of her independence and agency. This story was a well-known folk tale, performed as drama during the Ming period, with the mainstream endorsing Zhu as a positive character. As Altenburger indicates, accounts of women who lived in male disguise were even incorporated into the official historiography of female virtues, such as *Lie Nü Zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Notable Women) (Figure 2).¹⁵ The Ming versions of this text included the figure Hua Mulan 花木蘭, a legendary female warrior who substituted for her aged father in the army during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420 – 589). Illustrations of the text and Hua’s stories won wide distribution in the seventeenth century,¹⁶ coinciding with the boom of print culture. These images associated cross-dressing with dominant values and rendered women’s adoption of this practice as a means to emulate a moral paragon.

The practice of cross-dressing was highly relevant to the courtesan community. According to literary records, Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618 – 1644)—a contemporary of Lin Xue and one of the eight leading courtesans in Nanjing—used to don men’s garments. One of these records was *Xiao Tian Ji Nian* 小腆記年, published in 1861 by Xu Zi 徐鼒 (1810 – 1862), an official historian of the late Qing government who specialized in the history of southern Ming. As Xu noted,

柳頗涉文史，常衣儒服，飄巾大袖，出與四方賓客談論，故謙益又號為柳儒士。

Liu [Rushi] had a considerable learning of literature and history. She oftentimes dressed herself in a Confucian scholar’s attire, wearing *piaojin*, with wide sleeves, and stepped out from [the inner quarters] to converse with guests from near and far, so

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¹⁵ Ibid., p. 170.
Figure 2. Anonymous. *Li Nei Zhuan* (Biographies of Notable Women). 1573-1619. Print.
Qian Qianyi\textsuperscript{17} also referred to her as the “Confucian Scholar Liu.”\textsuperscript{18}

Even though the credibility of this source because of the distance between its author and Liu Rushi in time could be contested, from this anecdote, the relevance of cross-dressing to Lin Xue’s social environment becomes clear.

It was highly possible that Lin Xue had personal experience with cross-dressing, or was at least acutely aware of this practice. In his play \textit{Yi Zhong Yuan} 意中緣, the Qing dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1610 – 1680) fashioned the historical Lin Xue into a protagonist, who cross-dressed during her travel from Hangzhou to Fujian. Although no historical record can testify to the veracity of this plot, Lin may have adopted cross-dressing as a means of self-protection. As Altenburger suggests,

At least one core motivation for female-to-male cross-dressing...has been universally shared across cultures and historical periods: the self-protection as a single woman needed while traveling and spending extensive periods of time outside home...A woman traveling alone was extremely exposed, not only to the common dangers of the road, but also to male gazing and molesting...Donning male disguise was a well-known temporary strategy that adventurism women in late imperial China occasionally employed.\textsuperscript{19}

Cross-dressing provided unescorted women with male appearances that could reduce unwelcome dangers and attention in her long-distance journeys. In this sense, it would not be surprising if Lin Xue’s disguise as a male passenger in Li Yu’s play originated from popular accounts of her cross-dressing in reality.

Meanwhile, one crucial aspect of cross-dressing allows one to probe into the undercurrents of Lin Xue’s paintings: according to Altenburger, “Cross-dressing relies on

\textsuperscript{17} Though initially a courtesan artist, Liu Rushi was married to Qian Qianyi (1582—1664), a preeminent scholar of her day. This marriage allowed Liu to become a painter from the elite clans and therefore to differ from other courtesan artists. On account of the rarity of Liu’s extant works, with few paintings indicating their years of creation, it is difficult to ascertain the development of Liu’s style as a courtesan and as a concubine. While James Cahill puts forward that no painting by Liu can be dated prior to her marriage, in this essay, I regard Liu as a courtesan painter for the convenience of comparison and discussion. Cahill, James. “The Painting of Liu Yin.” In \textit{Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting}, edited by Marsh Smith Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), p. 106.

\textsuperscript{18} What is interesting about this text is Qian Qianyi’s wordplay. His reference of Liu Rushi to “Confucian Scholar Liu” is a pun, since this title is a homophone of Liu Rushi’s name. Xu Zi 徐恵. “Mingqi shuji Qian Qianyi wei libu shangshu xieli zhanshi fushi 明起成籍錢謙益為禮部尚書協理詹事府事,” \textit{Xiao Tian Ji Nian 小腆紀年}, jian 6. Carved in 1861 咸豐十一年刻本.

\textsuperscript{19} Altenburger, “Is It Clothes that Make the Man? Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Sex in Pre-Twentieth-Century Zhu Yingtaí Lore,” p. 183.
make-belief, on deception, on the willful manipulation of perception.”\textsuperscript{20} This remark underlines that the aim of cross-dressing is not a committed adoption of another gender identity, but the pursuit of an \textit{appearance} that temporarily transforms an individual into a different role. That is, a cross-dresser aspires not to the authenticity of his or her gender reversal but to an illusion. Concurrent with this effort to mask one’s sex is the disclosure of one’s actual gender identity. Hence, as Altenburger further illuminates, “On the semiotic level, the basic ambivalence of cross-dressing translates into two contradictory impulses: one covering up, the other one seeking to reveal.”\textsuperscript{21} This ambivalence is critical to an understanding of Lin Xue’s paintings, since they conceal the artist’s identity as a woman, while her femininity paradoxically plays a crucial role in building her public persona.

An examination of Lin Xue’s oeuvre reveals her spare usage of words and inscriptions. This reservation distinguishes Lin Xue from other courtesan painters and renders her paintings a visual performance of cross-dressing. According to Li Shi, courtesan painters attended to inscriptions and colophons for various purposes, typically the entertainment of their clients and the injection of emotional undertones into their paintings.\textsuperscript{22} An album painted by Liu Rushi \textit{Landscape with Figures} demonstrates this attention (Figure 3).\textsuperscript{23} Liu endows each leaf of the album with a poem and saturates this album with her voice. In one leaf, the artist writes,

\begin{quote}
凉散碧梧影， Coolness spread from the shade of the green wutong \textit{[tree]};
横琴每夕曛。 Each evening at dusk I strum my zither lying aslant.
静涵千澗水， A calm envelops a thousand mountain streams;
坐送隔溪雲。 Seated, I bid farewell to clouds from across the brook.
仙樂鈞天夢， Immortal music dreams of a paradisiacal Golden Age;
秋聲落雁羣。 Sounds of autumn fall among the flocks of wild geese.
綺寮風細細， The breeze by the window is ever so gentle and fine,
香沁藕絲裙。 While fragrance seeps into my lotus-patterned skirt.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 172.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 192.
\textsuperscript{22} Li, \textit{Ming qing guige huihua yanjiu}, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{23} Since this album contains no dates, I will consider its creation from the courtesan painter Liu Rushi instead of the concubine artist Liu Rushi to compare it to Lin Xue’s works.
\textsuperscript{24} This translation is taken from the catalogue \textit{Views from the Jade Terrace: Women Artists 1300 – 1912}. Weidner, \textit{Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912}, p. 100.
Figure 3. Rushi, Lin. Landscape with Figures. Date unknown. Ink and colors on paper. The Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Dubosc Collection, Paris.
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This inscription not only evokes a soothing sense of peace and tranquility but also reinforces Liu’s identity as a woman, since the artist lingers on the fragrance of her skirt in the last line.

By virtue of this inscription, Liu develops a psychological subtlety and depth in her painting. She situates the scene on a low hill and renders an almost tripartite image, depicting a giant garden rock on the left, two parasol trees in the middle, and a pavilion on the right. Inside this pavilion, a female figure, perhaps Liu’s self-image, lays her hands upon a zither. According to James Cahill, this image reveals three characteristics: a geometric division of composition, a flat, linear style, and a heavier reliance on poetic sensibilities than on technique. All these aspects manifest Liu’s taste as a cultivated scholar, and render Liu’s painting an image of cross-dressing. The twist of this leaf lies in the contradiction between its image and inscription, despite the harmony of their idyllic evocations. That is, while Lin’s style is reminiscent of a literati’s hand, her inscription diverges from this connotation and clarifies her identity as a woman. This paradox precisely echoes the ambivalence that Altenburger demonstrates in her study – the ambivalence of a cross-dresser’s desire to conceal and to confess her actual gender.

On the contrary, none of Lin Xue’s catalogued paintings seems to carry any prolonged inscription or self-disclosure. In the four paintings illustrated by the catalogue *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912*, the artist provides no more than eleven characters for each work. While she indicates in two of these paintings their recipient and style respectively, the other half of the group only bear the artist’s signature and times of creation. For example, in the fan painting *Landscape* discussed above, Lin specifies:

壬午春正月寫林雪。 Sketched in renwu [1642], the first month of spring, Lin Xue.26

This brevity of information seems characteristic of the artist’s creations. Although the scarcity of catalogued images prevents further investigation, it is possible that Lin was reticent to reveal herself as a female artist, which nevertheless provided her images with a stronger masculine presence.

The sharp contrast between this masculine presence and Lin Xue’s identity as a female artistforegrounds rather than obscures her femininity. On this fan painting, an

inscription written by a male scholar named Jin Lang 金烺 can be found in addition to Lin Xue’s indication of her time of creation. This inscription reads:

金烺题:  Jin Lang inscribes:
薰風拂拂畫樓初,  The southern breezes softly blowing come early to the painted pavilion;
遥想當年林妓書。  From afar I recall the grand courtesan Lin.
北苑風流猶是昨,  Beiyuan’s [Dong Yuan] refined style is just like yesterday;
几回纵目知踟蹰。  How many times have I let my eyes roam as alone as I paced to and fro?

林天素建寧名妓也,生平以書畫擅長。予生也晚不及親睹芳嶶,今子房三弟以扇頭示予,并屬予題詠聊寫數言,恐不足盡其天香國色之妙,并屬吾弟珍藏之。甲寅夏孟雪鷺烺漫書。  

Lin Tiansu was a famous courtesan of Qianning [Fujian]. She excelled at painting and calligraphy throughout her life. I was born too late to personally witness her beauty and accomplishments. My third brother Zifang showed me this fan and invited me to write a few words [on it] as an inscription. I am concerned that [my writing] is inadequate to thoroughly express the wonder of her heavenly fragrance and stately beauty, and I instructed my younger brother to treasure [the fan]. Jiayin, summer, first month, casually written by Xuelu Lang.  

This inscription delivers two vital pieces of information. First, the viewer Jin Lang recognized Dong Yuan’s style in Lin Xue’s painting. Second, he laid particular emphasis on the artist’s beauty. Jin Lang perceived Lin’s femininity as strongly as the masculinity of the artist’s image, which indicates a simultaneous occurrence of her concealment and revelation.

This second aspect merits further attention. As Li Na and Marsha Weidner suggest, during the seventeenth century, one of the highest compliments to female artists was their departure from femininity—or in the language of their day, from the sense of “rouge and powder (zhifen qi 脂粉氣).” As Dong Qichang remarked on Lin Xue in his Poetry Collection

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27 This translation is taken from the catalogue Views from the Jade Terrace: Women Artists 1300 – 1912. Ibid., p. 95 – 96.
28 For Li’s discussion, please refer to her essay “Wan Ming mingji huajia Lin Xue xihu youzong ji chuangzuo kao.” Li, Na, “Wan Ming mingji huajia Lin Xue xihu youzong ji chuangzuo kao,” p. 59. For Weidner’s analysis, see the catalogue Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912. Weidner, Views from the Jade Terrace:
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of Rongtai 容台詩集:

山居荏苒幾三十年，而闺秀之能為畫史者一再出，又皆著于武林之西湖。初為林天素…求女人相了不可得。

As I lived in reclusion for thirty years and more, female painters who could gain a foothold in the history of paintings emerged one after another, and they all inhabited the martial world by the side of the West Lake. The first [of the female painters] was Lin Tiansu…[whose paintings] did not pursue a woman’s appearance.29

A core merit of Lin Xue’s paintings was their absence of feminine attributes, which underlined a gender paradox. That is, the artist’s rise as a female painter hinged precisely upon the masculinity of her images—a pictorial disavowal of her identity as a woman.

Another gender paradox immediately followed. While this disavowal paved the way for Lin Xue’s rise in a male-dominant artistic community, after entry into the art circle, her femininity then became a target of attention. From his inscription, Jin Lang’s strong fascination with Lin Xue as a woman, which exceeded his fascination with her work, is illuminated when he specifies her identity as a courtesan in the first sentence after the poem and refers multiple times to the artist’s beauty. In Jin Lang’s eye, the artist outweighted her creations. While Lin disguised herself as a reputable scholar in art, in reality, she received accolades as a bona fide woman. The artist’s cross-dressing images thus expanded her gender experiences, allowing her to adopt a full range of gender identities and to examine the mindset of a different sex while maintaining that of her own.

In this way, the social acceptance and practice of cross-dressing in the seventeenth century enriches the understanding of Lin Xue’s oeuvre, contextualizing the artist’s creations and shedding light on her commitment to landscape paintings. Beyond its relevance to Lin Xue’s artistic practice, cross-dressing also provides a fresh perspective through which to comprehend the significance of other women artists’ works. In fact, those who performed cross-dressing through the means of painting were not limited to the courtesan community. While Liu Rushi’s aforementioned leaf evokes a scholar amateur’s aesthetics, creations by female painters from other social strata also display bold images of masculinity. These works

include *Pine Tree, after Xia Chang* by Cai Han 蔡含 (1647 – 86), a concubine, and fan paintings by Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介 (active around 1650), a descendent of a literati clan.³⁰ Later on, landscape paintings by Chen Shu 陳書 (1660 – 1736), who married into a prestigious scholarly family, were even incorporated into the Qing imperial collection.³¹ Lin Xue’s oeuvre therefore provides a vantage point for the investigation of more women painters’ legacies, which transcend gender boundaries and demonstrate the complexity of pre-modern femininity.

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³⁰ Cai Han was a concubine of the distinguished Ming writer Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611 – 1693). Her painting *Pine Tree, after Xia Chang* is illustrated in Weidner’s catalogue. Weidner, *Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912*, p. 112 – 113.


³¹ Chen Shu’s paintings were included in Li Shi’s books and in Weidner’s catalogue. Li, *Ming qing guige huibua yanjuan*, p. 143 – 150. Weidner, *Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912*, p. 117.
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In December of 1917, Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani held his first and only solo 
exhibition at the Galerie Berthe Weill in Paris, a venue located across the street from a police 
station. The controversial exhibition, which showcased a series of nude paintings and 
drawings by the artist, was quickly shut down for its “pornographic” nature, and both the 
dealer and Modigliani were subsequently arrested for their display.¹ It was not mere nudity 
that shocked and scandalized the viewers of Modigliani’s works; the impetus for the 
scandalized reaction was instead his overt, unapologetic depiction of pubic hair. 
Retrospectively, the 1917 Modigliani exhibition can be viewed as the culmination and the 
end of hundreds—perhaps even thousands—of years of artistic practice that consistently 
hid, abstracted, and erased the pubic hair of female nudes or that otherwise confined its 
depiction to the private sphere.

This tradition saw its inception in classical antiquity, a period in which the 
overwhelming majority of sculpted male nudes did include prominent pubic hair, while the 
genitalia of their female counterparts remained either bare or decorously overlaid with thin 
drapery. This division along gender lines continued into the Italian Renaissance, and into 
nearly every other classically influenced movement or period that followed in European art, 
until the early twentieth century.² Even in the culture of avant-gardism that arose in the first 
half of the twentieth century in Europe, the treatment of female pubic hair by modern artists 
was inconsistent at best. In order to demonstrate this varying and evolving treatment of 

¹ Meryle Secrest, Modigliani (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 265-266. 
² Anne Hollander, Seeing Through Clothes (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 136-137. In the section on nudity in Seeing Through Clothes, 
Hollander discusses an interesting exception to this rule during the Northern Renaissance.
pubic hair in the nudes of early twentieth century European art, three diverse works from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York will be analyzed in the following argument: André Derain’s Bathers from 1907, Pablo Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon from 1907, and Amedeo Modigliani’s Reclining Nude from c. 1917-1919. In glaring contrast to Modigliani’s work, Derain and Picasso chose not to depict the pubic hair of their figures. The following argument will investigate the implications of pubic hair’s inclusion and exclusion in these three works and the consequences the matter has for the works’ sense of modernism. While the inclusion of pubic hair can and does confirm the modernity of an artwork, its absence does not necessarily revoke that modernity.

The earliest of the three works, André Derain’s Bathers, was exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants of 1907 in Paris (Figure 4). In this painting, Derain contrasts the bright, warm-toned bodies of three bathing women with a cooler background of navy blue and subdued green. He uses thick, bold outlines to delineate these yellow- and orange-hued women from their setting, and these outlines, which take the same cool-toned color palette as the background, unite Derain’s figures with their ground. This creates an uncertainty of space that firmly cements Derain’s work within the modern realm. Though his bold colors are reminiscent of Fauvism, Derain’s ambiguity of perspective and space, his thickly applied and layered paint, the abstracted faces of his figures, and the flat planes of their bodies collectively contribute to the sense of a more modern and less classical style.

Gertrude Stein described the pioneering nature of Bathers aptly when she wrote that the work was “indicative of Derain’s switch from the Matisse to the Picasso ‘camp,’” meaning that the painting moved away from Fauvism and towards the newer, more innovative mode of Cubism. This new move is exemplified by the combined influence of Paul Cézanne and of African sculpture, a combination that typified the Cubist style. Derain’s technique of generalizing his figures through simplification here indicates the influence of Cézanne’s geometric simplicity, and the faces of the bathers are undeniably

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3 Alfred Werner, Amedeo Modigliani (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 102. Though the year of 1919 given to Modigliani’s Reclining Nude by the Museum of Modern Art postdates the disrupted 1917 exhibition of Modigliani’s works at Galerie Berthe Weill, some historians (such as Alfred Werner in the work cited here) argue for an earlier date of creation, and therefore argue for the work’s inclusion within the Weill show. Even if the work was indeed created after the failed exhibition as MoMA suggests, however, the work’s style, composition, and treatment of pubic hair nonetheless remain nearly identical with the works presented at the show, and therefore will be discussed within that same context.
7 Ball, “The Early Figural Paintings of Andre Derain,” 89.
inspired by African masks. The face of the central figure particularly resembles a type of mask from the French Congo, which is crafted in a block-like shape and decorated with simple indented features. On the basis of these influences, therefore, it is reasonable to claim that Derain’s work is a modern one.

Despite this apparent radicalism, however, Bathers nonetheless remains conclusively located within the classical tradition of figure painting. Regardless of his advanced technique, the treatment of the female subject in Derain’s work “still evokes the physical beauty of female bodies in a landscape” that had been the norm for hundreds of years in Western art.

This ideal of physical beauty is especially evident in the depiction—specifically the lack thereof—of pubic hair in Bathers. Derain subtly but deftly sidesteps the question of pubic hair in three different ways, using a new method for each bather. The question of pubic hair for the figure on the right is eliminated entirely, as her body is turned completely away from the picture plane, and she instead presents her back and buttocks to the viewer. The bather located in the left third of the painting wears a draped, blue-white piece of cloth across her hips, which does fall slightly on one side to reveal the figure’s hipbone but still completely hides her mons pubis and therefore any glimpse of pubic hair. This technique of demurely arranged fabric is similar to those used by both Ancient Greek sculptors and Italian Renaissance painters, who utilized the draped, diaphanous cloth typical of classical attire to preserve a sense of the sitter’s feminine modesty, and therefore to avoid the question of pubic hair entirely. In contrast to that of the two flanking bathers, however, the question of pubic hair remains unanswered for the main figure in the middle of the work. Derain does include a small section of dark, greenish-blue paint between the figure’s legs. It is wholly unclear, however, whether this section of paint is actually meant to indicate a patch of pubic hair or functions as a mere shadow. This vague section of paint echoes the techniques used by later Venetian painters to depict pubic hair without controversy; these artists often utilized ambiguous shading techniques to evade the question of pubic hair entirely, and in doing so, prevented the viewer from drawing any definite conclusions about its inclusion or exclusion.

As did the use of classical drapery seen on the left figure, the tendency to allude to or suggest the presence of pubic hair through shadow but without

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painting it outright preceded Derain’s *Bathers* by several hundred centuries. It may therefore be concluded that, despite Derain’s attempts at belonging to a new, modern figural tradition through his technique, his generalization of form, and his primitivism, his female figures remain entrenched in a more classical, academic tradition than his visual style would initially indicate.

In contrast to Derain’s *Bathers*, Pablo Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* is typically regarded as the antithesis to classicism (Figure 5). Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler describes the work as “the beginning of Cubism,” and André Breton remarks that “with this painting we bid farewell to all paintings of the past.” Les Demoiselles is often regarded as the first painting belonging wholly to the twentieth-century. When first presented to various viewers, however, Picasso’s first Cubist work was met with vehement disdain and revulsion. As a result, the painting remained completely hidden from the public eye for years, before finally becoming accessible to a more general audience over three decades later.

In this famous spark of the Cubist movement, Picasso depicts five nude prostitutes in what is commonly agreed to be a bordello. While two of these women are presented in profile and appear uninterested in the viewer, the remaining three gaze directly out of the picture plane. Three of the women have abstracted but still somewhat natural-looking faces, while the two figures on the right appear to be wearing frightening, colorful tribal masks. Picasso moves away in *Les Demoiselles* from the simulative trappings of classical perspective and further toward a rendering of space and temporality that are emancipated from traditional systems of representation. This disruption of classical perspective is most evident in the still life seen toward the bottom of the work, in which several pieces of fruit have been placed upon an impossibly tilted table. The background of the work is similarly abstract and distorted, with layered and disjointed planes of color creating a striking dynamic tension behind the five figures. In *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso has separated the fact of volume from any visual manifestation through the standard pictorial language of light and depth.

It has been argued that Picasso has also broken here with the classical figural tradition by avoiding any depiction of women as submissive and ideally beautiful figures. Picasso’s women opt instead to be unapologetically confrontational; three of the five women

15 Chave, “New Encounters,” 597.
18 Ibid.
make direct, unflinching eye contact with the viewer. The nude women are the opposite of conventionally attractive, with their Iberian and African masked faces, their asymmetrical features and angular bodies, and, above all, their masculine aggressive attitudes. The type of woman that Picasso paints here is representative of “a devouring femininity” unlike any other that had been portrayed before in Western painting. Picasso’s type of woman is monstrous in her ability to instill both fear and desire in the viewer “because she is perceived as being dangerous and inaccessible.” There exists in Les Demoiselles a fetishization of a fierce, masculine womanhood, one that defies all previous, outmoded concepts of the ideal female beauty as something passive, yielding, and powerless.

In contrast to the definitively modern nature of their personalities, however, the figures in Les Demoiselles have no pubic hair. The groins of the five women blend into the rest of their bodies with no alterations of either color or texture. One of the figures is even covered by the translucent drapery of classicism. If Picasso had been so against “what was called beauty in the museums” as he once claimed, pubic hair would have served as the perfect device to subvert traditional feminine beauty. As Louise Tondeur writes: “One of the main functions of body modification is the demarcation of gender and of fertility.” In other words, pubic hair was merely another traditional device used to delineate male and female nudes along gender lines. The radical inclusion of pubic hair, then, would have allowed Picasso to extend the masculinity of his figures beyond that conveyed by mere facial expression or attitude. In one of his multiple monographs on Pablo Picasso, Pierre Daix wrote that Picasso “had freed painting from the trammels of academic tradition, religious lies, and social respectability.” The painting itself, however, might argue for a different interpretation. The absence of pubic hair in Les Demoiselles is inarguably a “trammel” of academic tradition. A lack of pubic hair is both a religious lie concerning the sexual purity of women and a matter of social respectability. Picasso avoided classical tropes in his technique and composition but embraced them in his subject matter. The argument can be made that, though he did create a modern work, Picasso failed to paint a truly modern nude. By conforming to this singular convention of absent pubic hair, Picasso might have failed to escape entirely from the traditions of classicism, and mired his work instead in the same standards of female beauty as did Derain.

21 Ibid.
Another interpretation that can be offered for the work is that Picasso paints in order to confront the problematic dichotomy of masculinity and femininity present in the classical tradition that he seems to suggest. Though his figures do have masculine, aggressive attitudes and androgynous faces, their bodies are undeniably feminine, wasp-waisted, and hairless. This juxtaposition may confront the previously rigid definitions of womanhood and manhood. If this is the case, then Picasso has not mired his work in the classical tradition, but has instead self-referentially utilized the tradition to question its origins and its meanings, making *Les Demoiselles* a modern nude in the end.

While Derain and Picasso painted *Bathers* and *Les Demoiselles* in the same year, 1907, Modigliani’s *Reclining Nude* was painted at least a decade later (Figure 6). This passage of time is not insignificant, and is reflected in the stylistic tendencies of the paintings themselves. Whereas pubic hair seems to be a topic somewhat tangential to the nudes of Derain and Picasso, there is no subtlety concerning the pubic hair in Modigliani’s work. Especially when compared to a centuries-long history of absent pubic hair, the subject’s hirsute groin stands out immediately from the wide expanse of golden-orange skin. Both this dark brown triangle of her pubic hair as well as her unshaven underarm immediately assert their presence; the subject is impossible to ignore. The unabashed figure reclines across the entirety of the picture space, her arms raised above her head in a relaxed, unassuming pose, her legs cut off at the thigh by the rightmost edge of the canvas. Just as he does for her pubic hair, Modigliani avoids idealizing the model’s breasts and stomach, which slump down naturally toward the bed. The figure’s proportions are exaggerated, her torso thin and elongated, her hips, chest, and arms full and round. She is undeniably feminine, but Modigliani’s depiction of her body also avoids falling into the tropes of classical proportions and beauty.

The nude figure lies on a bed of some sort painted in a palette of brownish-red, black, and green, and the entirety of the painting is thickly textured with self-evident brushstrokes. There has been some suggestion that the work’s uniformity of texture and the pubic hair’s place within that textural pattern lessens the controversial impact of the pubic fleece upon the viewer. In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander discusses the textural homogeneity of Modigliani’s work:

“Modigliani’s paintings had a linear abstractness of design and flatness of texture that permitted head hair, pubic hair, flesh, and bed covers to make acceptable formal compositions on neutral ground, so to speak, without the undue prurient emphasis that occurs when the difference in texture of the two kinds of hair is indicated.”

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In other words, Modigliani transforms the model’s body as well as her pubic hair and the bed clothes from representational images to formal aspects, more decorative subjects than erotic ones. Along this same line, it has been continually argued that, despite his socially provocative depiction of pubic hair, Modigliani did not endeavor to paint sexually explicit images or “to depict sexual phenomena.” “His ambitions were higher” than mere pornographic material. Modigliani walks the precarious line here between outright eroticism and a more sensitive depiction of sensuality. This is a degree of complexity and nuance that functions as an indicator of the artist’s advanced modernity.

Despite the present-day arguments against any sexual profanity on the part of Modigliani, however, these arguments obviously did not hold against the opinion of the 1917 audience, as previously detailed in the story of Modigliani’s exhibition at the Galerie Berthe Weill. Pubic hair is not the only factor that caused this censorship, but it was certainly the spark. Just as it is a common trope for banned books to become classics of the literary canon, perhaps censorship is the mark of a modern work, in that it indicates a move beyond what the mainstream is capable of understanding and accepting. Despite the similar modernity of the three works under discussion here, the Modigliani is a completely opposite work to Derain’s and particularly to Picasso’s. His figure, more so than any of the others do, appears initially to be entrenched in the classical tradition. Modigliani paints an unmistakably feminine woman instead of five monstrous, masculine prostitutes or three primitives. His figure closes her eyes and is observed by the viewer rather than confronting them head-on. Her body and her features are round and plump, not angular. And yet, Modigliani’s nude ends up being just as modern, if not more so, than the ones by Picasso or Derain. It is not solely the depicted pubic hair that makes Reclining Nude a modern work, either. A modern work on its own merit, the painting is anything but naturalistic and has something distinctly unreal about it. It brings “to the spectator an acute sense of presence by reshaping the familiar form we know into a more vivid presentment,” meaning the striking image of a modern woman.

Pubic hair does not make a modern work, but instead transforms a work into a modern nude as such; it is a sign confirming rather than creating modernity. The depiction of pubic hair takes a painting of existing innovation and adds to it levels of authenticity, truth,

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26 Ibid., 22.
27 Ibid.
28 Werner, Amedeo Modigliani, 102.
29 Hall, Modigliani, Plate 38.
and vulnerability that were previously absent, and elevates the work beyond measures of modernity imbued with less social import such as perspective or depth. The Derain, the Picasso, and the Modigliani are all undeniably modern works. They challenged nearly every convention and standard of classical representation, and all three were met with hostility from more conservative contemporary audiences. The three works, however, accomplish this task in different ways. Modigliani simply advanced in a different direction from the others along the path toward modernism.
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Preservation of Cultural Heritage Beyond War: Case Study of Palmyra, Syria
Mathilde van Tulder

Introduction

Since the mid 1700’s the ancient city of Palmyra has been admired and recorded. The ancient architectural site is renowned for containing some of the most important monumental ruins. A museum there houses mosaics, third century funeral busts, Greco-Roman jewelry and sculptures from the city's history¹. In the 21st century, Palmyra’s location in a site of active military conflict has put both the structure and the artifacts it contains in danger of destruction. The damage to this site has arisen as a byproduct of civil war, as well as purposeful targeting of cultural heritage by the insurgent group ISIL. Many sites of significant political importance become direct targets in times of war and conflict.

Many complicated ethical questions accompany military zone conflict and cultural heritage, and the potential process of preservation must be addressed. How to treat the climate of global conflict in accordance to preserving cultural heritage is an urgent topic faced in the twenty-first century.

Palmyra

Designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 1980, Palmyra, Syria, is an oasis city in the Syrian desert located 250 kilometers’ northeast of the nation's capital, Damascus. While people lived in the area as early as the 19th century B.C., the existing structures were primarily built nearly 2,000 years ago. The placement of Palmyra, approximately halfway

between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River connected the Roman empire with Mesopotamia and lands farther east. With a system of protected and patrolled roads, Palmyra attracted many traders, allowing the city to flourish and profit. In the second century A.D., the city grew into a major trade route linking Persia, India, and China, thus making it a stopping point and crossroads of several major civilizations in the ancient world. Consequently, the city was conquered many times: by the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Through these exchanges, the desert city adopted many of the artistic and religious practices of its various rulers, resulting in its rich and composite style of art and architecture.

Palmyra—meaning Place of Palms—during the first to third centuries CE was a multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual society in which architecture fused classical ideas and techniques with those of Persia and Mesopotamia.

The ruins of Palmyra reveal the intricate urban plan of a once-thriving ancient city. A grand, Greco-Roman styled colonnaded street of over one kilometer with covered side passages forms the monumental east-west axis of the city, while many temples devoted to a variety of gods speak to the site’s spiritual metamorphosis. Other ruins include a vast complex called Diocletian’s Camp, the agora, arch-topped streets, the Senate House, the amphitheater, the Temple of Bel, the Temple of Baalshamin, and several early Christian churches. The Corinthian order marks most of the monuments, creating an outstanding illustration of architecture and urban layout from the peak of Rome’s power with evident influence of Mesopotamian and Persian architecture.

The Temple of Bel was considered the most important Roman structure in Syria. Dating back to the first century CE, the temple was laid out in an early Middle Eastern, but with Roman colonnades, entablature, and carvings. UNESCO named it "a remarkable fusion of the architectural styles of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman tradition, visible in its sculptured ceilings, monumental podium, and friezes, which told the story of the city and featured camel caravans and the constellations." This historically rich and vibrant city survived 2,000 years, as a city and trading post and eventually serving as a museum of its heritage, until modern conflict destroyed pieces of its history.

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5 McHugh, Jess. "How a Beloved World Heritage Site Became a Battlefield. And What's Next."
7 Ibid.
ISIL Invasion

Due to the unrest of the Syrian Civil War, and the importance of this cultural center, Palmyra has been on UNESCO’s List of World Heritage in Danger since 2013. However, it was not until May of 2015 that Palmyra was directly affected by the disturbances of the civil war. The Palmyra Offensive of May 2015 was a military operation launched by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from May 13 through 26, 2015 to capture the government-held Tadmur District (known in the US as Palmyra). ISIL and Syrian troops fought for over a week with ISIL seizing almost full control of the city, forcing the withdrawal of government troops. Due to rising fears over the safety of the ruins and the city's museum, attempts were made to salvage important artifacts. With government troops, still in control of a small portion of territory, authorities could relocate more than 400 statues and hundreds of artifacts to safer locations. Larger monuments and buildings could not be salvaged and were abandoned as the forces had to hurriedly withdraw from the area. As the city’s defenses crumbled, residents described panicked scenes of soldiers and police fleeing, wounded civilians unable to reach hospitals, and museum workers hurrying to pack up antiquities.

Museum workers filled trucks with antiquities and fled with what they could save as militants advanced. Four army trucks loaded with antiquities left Palmyra for Damascus that night before the town fell. During this mission, three museum workers were wounded by ISIL gunfire as they escaped with several truckloads of artifacts. Their colleagues dropped off the wounded at a nearby hospital and continued to Damascus with their salvaged objects, bringing them to a safe hiding space outside the grasp of the militants. Further attempts to protect the artifacts from the surrounding war included barricading the perimeter of vaults, rooms, and entire museums with sandbags to absorb the shock from explosions. In the event the sandbags explode, they cover the artifacts in a thick layer of dust, perhaps hiding them from invading looters.

Throughout June, July, and August of 2015, attacks and fighting between government forces and ISIL continued over the territory of Palmyra. In June, ISIL blew up

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8 Kontokosta, Anne Hrychuk. "NYUMUN Presents: UNESCO| Palmyra."
13 Ibid
Figure 7. Temple of Bel. c. 1st or 2nd century CE. Palmyra, Syria.
several ancient shrines that were not Roman-era structures, but were considered pagan and sacrilegious. In early July, ISIL released a video showing the killing of 25 government soldiers in Palmyra’s Roman amphitheater. These brutal acts changed the meaning and significance of the heritage site.

On August 19th, ISIL beheaded the Syrian antiquities expert and retired head archaeologist of the site, 81-year-old Khaled al-Assad, who had dedicated his adult life to the site of Palmyra. He had been the principal custodian of the Palmyra site since 1963. Khaled al Assad worked on numerous archaeological missions in collaborations with American, Polish, German, French and Swiss governments and organizations. His most praised administrative achievement was elevating Palmyra to UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition in 1980. In 2003, he was part of the Syrian-Polish team that uncovered a 3rd-century mosaic portraying a struggle between a human and a winged animal, which he described as "one of the most precious discoveries ever made in Palmyra".

Khaled al-Assad was world renowned in the field of antiquities and a sought-after speaker at conferences, where he presented extensive research and important discoveries. When he retired in 2003, his son, Walid, took on his role at the site of Palmyra; however, Khaled remained a daily presence at the site. When Palmyra was invaded, both father and son refused to leave and abandon their life work. After three months of detention by ISIL, Khaled al-Assad was beheaded by militants in Palmyra for refusing to reveal where valuable artifacts had been hidden for safekeeping.

**Destruction at Palmyra**

A few days after the execution of Khaled al-Assad, ISIL rigged two of the site’s most important buildings with explosives, and destroyed the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin, as well as the renowned Triumphant Arch. The multiple uses of explosives and bulldozers to destroy the Temples of Bel and Baalshamin leaves little hope for their repair.

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Figure 8. Temple of Baalshamin. c. 1st century CE
UNESCO has condemned the purposeful destruction of these monuments as a "war crime".

The Temple of Baalshamin, dating back to the late 2nd century BC, was dedicated to the Canaanite sky deity (rain god), Baalshamin (Figure 8). It was originally erected in the late 2nd century BC, but the altar was built in 115 AD, and the temple was substantially rebuilt in 131 AD. The prostyle structure is fronted by four Corinthian style columns with projecting statue bases, one of which was known to hold a statue of the Roman emperor Hadrian. The structure also featured a large temenos, or surrounding colonnade wall, in the Roman style. With the spread of Christianity in the region in the 5th century AD, the temple was converted and adapted into a church. Swiss archaeologists uncovered the temple in 1954; it was one of the most complete and intact ancient structures in Palmyra. The great temple of Baalshamin is one of the most important religious buildings in the East. The carved sculptural elements of the monumental archway, through which the city is approached from the great temple, are outstanding examples of Palmyrene art.

The second structure of major importance, now lost, is the Temple of Bel, known as the great sanctuary of the Palmyrene gods, and built in 32AD. Once the center of religious life in ancient Palmyra, it is widely known as one of the most important temples in the whole of the Middle East. The 34,000-square-meter structure was composed of elements derived from Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian architectural styles. The temple is constructed mainly in the ancient Greek Doric style, with columns featuring entasis. The temple also exhibits Roman characteristics, such as elevation on a podium. Egyptian references are apparent in the grand pylon-like doorway into the temple at its western facade. The doorway is made up of a monolithic post and lintel, which helped the doorway to withstand the explosives. The stone-carved coffered ceilings showed stylized near eastern patterns. The flat roof provided for a sacred high place of worship above the temple, an idea derived from older Mesopotamian ziggurats. Crowfoot merlons decorating the roof are frequently seen in Syrian architecture, and can be seen on several of the temples at Palmyra. The merged architectural forms in this temple display its cosmopolitan character.

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20 Kontokosta, Anne Hrychuk. "NYUMUN Presents: UNESCO| Palmyra."
21 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
The United Nations released satellite images and analyses that confirmed the destruction of the Temple of Bel. A row of columns in its immediate vicinity was also destroyed. The doorway is the only component that remains standing. The loss of this temple is the loss of the best preserved Greco-Roman site in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Its rare fusion of architectural styles was a literal representation of where the east met west on the great Silk Road.\(^{26}\)

**Cultural Heritage as Targets of Conflict**

It is evident that the cultural property of Palmyra has been intentionally attacked as part of a cultural cleansing campaign. This is not a new war strategy: looting and destruction of cultural heritage stretches far back into history. Ancient Near Eastern monarchs and Egyptian pharaohs defaced their predecessors’ portraits. In the fifth century BC, Persians sacked and burned the previous Parthenon building. Early Christians routinely appropriated pagan monuments as their new faith spread. In 1992, Serb forces destroyed Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Sarajevo National Library. In 2001, Taliban fighters demolished Afghanistan’s massive Bamiyan Buddha statues.

There are many motives for these acts. Cultural objects have always been closely tied to particular social, political, and historical contexts.\(^{27}\) These artifacts have the capability to become icons and symbols. Their iconic significance is commonly used as a tool in politics, serving as a symbol of the state or a certain group, thus providing an incentive for either their destruction or preservation.\(^{28}\)

Accusations of idolatry motivate ISIL’s destruction of Palmyra and its targeting of other historic sites that are of cultural and religious significance to other communities. The group's ideology demands a return to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. This idea leads to an emphasis on complete monotheism and the eradication of any depiction of God.\(^{29}\) The group’s justification for these acts are traced to accounts in Hadith literature recounting the Prophet Muhammad’s destruction of idols and images depicting pagan deities in the Kaaba after the conquest of Mecca.\(^{30}\) Revered historic buildings and monuments within Syria, such

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
as the temples of Baalshamin and Temple of Bel, are considered a threat to the ISIL caliphate.

This form of extremism, which has been seen among many religions, sees the existence of sites celebrating other faiths or cultures as a threat. These acts are committed to inspire horror and fear and to bring worldwide media attention. ISIL wishes to remove not only symbols of other faiths, but also anything valued by those who follow Islam in a divergent way.

Financial incentives also motivate attacks on cultural heritage. UNESCO warns that looting has been taking place on an “industrial scale” at the site of Palmyra since 2011. Revenue from stolen artifacts makes up the majority of the ISIL’s multi-million dollar income. Even though it is difficult to assign a price to cultural goods, UNESCO estimates that the international trade in conflict antiquities could be worth over two billion US dollars. Despite the numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions on the trade of artifacts looted from Syria, nothing has stopped the continuous and lucrative smuggling. Antiquities trackers from Heritage for Peace say that a number of Greco-Roman busts, jewelry, and other objects from the Palmyra museum have found their way onto the international market. Sellers provide vague information for the objects’ backgrounds, which lack papers and documentation. They claim origins elsewhere in the Middle East, or that the objects had appeared recently from private family collections. Police and customs officers in Turkey and Lebanon have confiscated numerous antiquities after receiving reports from agents who have scoured bazaars in Beirut, Istanbul, and Gaziantep in southeastern Turkey. But more troubling is the fact that many valuable artifacts will likely remain hidden and stored underground for decades.

Cultural Heritage

The city of Palmyra, like many other cultural heritage sites destroyed during conflict, has withstood thousands of years of war, weathering, and other destructive elements of time,

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32 Ibid.
33 Shaheen, Kareem, and Ian Black. "Beheaded Syrian Scholar Refused to Lead Isis to Hidden Palmyra Antiquities."
35 Ibid.
37 Belton, Pádraig. "A Tribute to Khaled Al-Asaad, the Archaeologist Killed by Isis in Palmyra."
38 Chastain, Mary. "Officials Rescued Palmyra Antiques Before ISIS Captured Town - Breitbart."
but it was eradicated in just a few moments by a war that is insignificant to the overall history that the site represents. The destruction of important historical and cultural sites as a tool of war is particularly egregious due to the much larger history of which these sites are a part. Tangible examples of cultural heritage act as powerful symbols of a united past that interweaves and blends ethnic, tribal, linguistic, or cultural differences.

Cultural heritage is significant not only for its contributions to art and architecture but also for its ability to transcend national and political boundaries. When destroying a culture's identity, aggressors wipe out entire histories, depriving future civilizations of these art monuments.

Nada Hassan, the UNESCO Arab States Unit Chief, explains that cultural heritage holds an important role in humanitarian relief. The cultural heritage of Palmyra is part of the Syrian population’s environment and is a part of their identity. The stealing of this history leads to greater consequences than just physical and art-related damages. The presence of tangible representations of history and identity is extremely important in the reunification process of a fragmented nation. When the war finally ends, Syrians will have to rebuild for their future, and in order to do this, they will need these tangible reminders of their shared past.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27, “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” Heritage is directly related to both politics and human rights. Social and community advocates assert that heritage is necessary for the articulation and preservation of cultural identity. The display of heritage monuments can be a strategy for asserting minority identity in the face of majority oppression, as well as be a tool for resistance and the expression of difference. Damage to the site of Palmyra is an immeasurable blow to the identity and history of Syrian people and against the universal history of humanity, and is in direct opposition to the goals of UNESCO.

Cultural cleansing is now used as a tactic of war, and is therefore designated as a war crime. There is no choice between protecting people or protecting culture; both are part of the same responsibility because culture is about belonging, identity, values, and common

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history.\textsuperscript{42} Through the destruction of these heritage sites, not just the cultural site is lost, but also the stories they tell.\textsuperscript{43}

Sites like Palmyra hold the physical embodiment of the heritage of the world. An attack on Palmyra is an attack on the concept of common heritage. Humanity should not overlook the destruction of these monuments.\textsuperscript{44} Products of creativity, civilization-building, and cultural tradition, monuments transcend individual destiny and current conflict.

**Preservation Methods**

The preservation of art and architecture is a highly controversial subject. Preservation has become a subject of international discussion since the Second World War, during which there was vast devastation of art and architecture. From this catastrophic loss of cultural heritage arose many organizations to protect, advocate for, and salvage heritage, many with conflicting views on how and to what degree preservation should be executed. Some groups were adamant about reconstruction efforts for destroyed or affected sites, while others believed their ruined state tells part of their story. In the middle of the 20th century, there was a rise in concern for the future preservation of heritage, and the creation of the basis for many new laws and regulations aimed at the protection of heritage in times of war.

**Physical Preservation**

In approaching preservation of cultural heritage in areas of conflict, preventing destruction and damage in any form is the highest priority. There are various ways to achieve this. Physical relocation and protection of art prior to its exposure to destructive conditions is a method that has been used to preserve artifacts, as was done to the extent possible at Palmyra. Staff members from the site risked their lives to relocate objects as militants were simultaneously entering the city. Thousands of smaller objects and statues were rescued from destruction and looting. The staff also made efforts to protect items that were too heavy and massive to be relocated on short notice. The Lion of al-Lāt, which is a nearly 2,000- year- old stone statue weighing 1.5 tons, was too heavy to be moved. The staff encased it in a large metal box in attempts to protect it, but this method was unsuccessful. In areas of conflict there is not often time for much more to be done. These strategies have


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

been seen in other heritage emergencies, such as the displacement of artifacts and manuscripts when the city of Timbuktu, Mali was under cultural attack.

In many cases, art cannot be saved from destruction and military conflict. This has led to the incorporation of new technologies in reconstruction, for example, anastylosis. Anastylosis is the restoration of ruined monuments or buildings by reassembling fallen parts and, when necessary, incorporating new materials.\(^{45}\) One main example of this technique is the re-erection of large part of colonnades on the Parthenon, the Temple of Nike, and the Propylaia in Athens.\(^{46}\) This method may be possible with some of the structures at Palmyra, such as the Arch of Triumph, which fell in large enough pieces to be reconstructed but the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin seem too destroyed to salvage in this manner. However, reconstruction is not a simple procedure, largely due to ethical dilemmas. For example, one of the questions that arises is whether it is important to save the story of the monument, with the visible effects of time, or recreate the structure as it was built 2,000 years ago.

**Technology as Preservation**

Palmyra was built with stone and mortar and will be rebuilt with computers and drones.\(^{47}\) Preservationists have announced that they will rely on new technologies to reconstruct some of the Middle East’s most treasured monuments that were destroyed during ISIL’s ten-month occupation of Palmyra.

The UNESCO World Heritage Organization has employed small drones to assess damage and provide a bird’s-eye view of areas in need of repair.\(^{48}\) Radar scanning is being used to view damage to underground structures and fragile monuments. In the last week of April 2016, the area of Palmyra was finally deemed safe for experts to travel to. UNESCO then sent a first-response team to assess the damage and work with Syrian officials to craft a plan for the future of Palmyra.\(^{49}\) The assessment team was sent to conduct a full detailed assessment of the site and damage; to safeguard the location, assess for mines, booby traps, and any other devices left by the ISIL militants; to conduct absolutely no restoration efforts before the end of the conflict; and to plan and confer with all stakeholders—Syrian people, government officials, experts, and other relevant individuals. Currently UNESCO is also


\(^{47}\) Ballout, Dana. "Ancient Sites Survived Islamic State Occupation."

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

attempting to relocate looted items, and is conducting intensive training for police and customs officers to limit the loss of looted items.\(^{50}\)

More radical and groundbreaking advances in technology have also been considered as preservation methods at Palmyra. The Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA) founded in 2012 by Roger Michel is a joint effort between Harvard and Oxford Universities to create an open-source database, called The Million Images Database, of high-resolution images and 3D graphics.\(^{51}\) At the institute’s outset, participants began to digitally document ancient architecture with the intention of ensuring the legacy of these sites from deterioration, and were not concerned with the destruction of heritage sites as a tool of war.\(^{52}\) In collaboration with other institutions such as The Museum of the Future in Dubai, the IDA is supplying volunteers with 5,000 lightweight 3-D cameras to document at-risk cultural sites throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The goal is to take millions of digital images of sites using this new three-dimensional imaging technology so that as much as possible can be documented in case these sites are lost forever.\(^{53}\)

The Million Image Database provides 360-degree views of objects to create accurate computer models. The building data are archived permanently, providing the information for potential reconstruction, restoration, and 3D printing. The captured images provide vital information to Syrian archaeologists working on the recreation of the destructed monuments.

The institute is helping preservation by archiving sites that may be damaged in the future, but the IDA is also playing a huge role in the preservation of Palmyra. Cultural organizations have been working to create precise, life-sized, three-dimensional recreations of the threatened monuments from Palmyra, in case the originals are damaged beyond repair.\(^{54}\)

The first complete large scale 3D model of Palmyra’s Arch of Triumph was exhibited in Trafalgar Square, London, and soon moved to New York City’s Times Square in the fall of 2016. The reproduction was created from a 3D computer model generated from dozens of archived photographs of the arch taken before the Islamic State captured Palmyra.\(^{55}\) The photographs were put into a database to create a complete and accurate file, which was then sent to Italy. There, robots were programmed to carve the reproduction from blocks of

\(^{50}\) Ibid.
\(^{52}\) Ibid.
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) Farrell, Stephen. "If All Else Fails, 3D Models and Robots Might Rebuild Palmyra."
\(^{55}\) Ibid.
Egyptian marble in accordance with the information on the file. With these machines and technology, an object that used to take weeks of skilled manual labor to create, can be reconstructed in just a few hours.

Syrian antiquities director Maamoun Abdulkarim believes that with these types of new technologies Palmyra could be reconstructed to its condition prior to the ISIL occupation within only five years. However, other experts and academics are more skeptical, saying that to repair this site, many years of research and immense resources will be necessary, and that some areas are beyond repair. Additionally, strict views on conservation could impair Palmyra’s reconstruction efforts. Many believe technological improvements are not substitutes for knowledge held by the generations of Syrian historians who built and restored this city’s monuments.

Controversy

Marie Paule Roudil, the Director of UNESCO Liaison Office New York, finds that reproductions will never replace the real Palmyra, because the quality of the reproductions cannot live up to the hand-carving and precision put into the original stonework. Symbolically, these recreations are immensely important, but the story and real value are gone forever. Ms. Roudil also mentioned that she is against the thought of recreating the site of Palmyra in this manner. Like many others in the art world, she finds that there is value in what modern constructions can have as exhibitions, but does not believe they belong on the actual ground of lost heritage sites. Many believe that the reconstructions could be more appropriately used as a monumental representation, but not as an actual replacement for the destroyed monuments.

Currently, the greatest threat to Palmyra is mismanagement, which stems from prioritizing immediate results over educated and reasonable actions. The urgency for action is grounded in larger political objectives and is not guided by conservation’s best practices. While it is tempting to respond to the most glaring and highly published damage, there are better uses for these resources. A coherent emergency plan, which prioritizes the intact monuments in need of repair and maintenance, should be put in place. The full extent of the

56 Ibid.
57 Ballout, Dana. "Ancient Sites Survived Islamic State Occupation."
damage will not be known until heritage experts are allowed full access to the site to complete a detailed assessment.\textsuperscript{59}

When dealing with the question of whether or not to restore or rebuild damaged and destroyed cultural heritage, there is no coherent approach. The appropriateness of preserving a monument or building often depends on the physical state and amount of destruction inflicted on the site. Preservation is vital, but some believe that the story of the destruction is as important a part of cultural history as the monument’s original condition.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
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Video Games in the 2004 and 2014 Whitney Biennial
Rachel Lim

Art and technology have always been and are becoming increasingly inseparable as technology advances and intersects with various disciplines. Present as both a subject and medium, technology has stimulated significant and numerous changes in the arts that have often not been recognized or incorporated into the art historical canon. Video games, which became popular with mainstream audiences as early as the 1970s, have become progressively more prevalent not only as fully integrated components of conventional life but also as an artistic medium.

Drawing from the catalogues, reviews, and artist and curatorial statements from the 2004 and 2014 Whitney Biennials, this paper examines how the implementation of video games changes and reflects the biennial platform and the institutional precedent for including this type of artwork. It compares the curatorial process, and the critical reception. The development and proliferation of this new medium indicates the rapid but perpetual changes in the curation of these spaces, the type of art produced, and what can be considered art as technology advances.

Before the effects of the medium can be discussed, the definition of biennials and purpose of the Whitney Biennial must first be examined. The term biennial refers to a variety of different exhibitions, with no source agreeing in their total number.¹ The first to carry the title was the Venice Biennial in 1895, but it was not until half a century later, when the São Paulo Biennial was founded in 1951, that the word was coined for this type of art event.² Influenced and popularized by the World’s Fairs’ Great Exhibition of 1851 and the

² Ibid.
Venice Biennale, biennials generally are global in ambition and exhibit work from various geographic areas or regions in a unitary exhibition space. The Whitney Biennial, founded in 1932, was first established as a large group exhibition of invited American artists and became a biennial in 1973. Limited in geography due to the exclusion of non-American artists, that biennial aimed to include all media in its curatorial approach. The 1993 edition of the biennial was hailed as a triumphant introduction of a generation of cutting-edge artists and the most diverse exhibit by a major American museum at the time. In response to this change, many commentators responded with confusion and heavy criticism, citing it as too politicized and “Politically Correct”. Yet, the Whitney has continued to aim for innovation and to break with precedent, remaining relevant by bringing in fresh, experimental artists and curators.

The 2004 Whitney Biennial has been praised for reunifying various demographic groups and providing a positive outlook for the future during a period of doubt. Taking place three years after 9/11, the biennial acknowledged the profound response of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty within the art community. There was increasing social pessimism that any established belief system—moral, political, religious or scientific—could provide a unifying cultural structure in America. The curators, Chrissie Illes, Debra Singer, and Shamim M. Momin, claimed to have created a significant change in contemporary art, comparing the current biennial to that of 1993 in magnitude while simultaneously rejecting the values of the 1990s.

These three curators gave an unconventional format to the organization of the biennial. It lacked a thematic structure and only connected certain affinities common to subgroups of artists. It also upheld a highly utopian vision of the future that relied on the potential of technology to create a new world and increase dialogue between separated groups. The biennial reflected themes of nostalgia, intergenerational dialogue, the Internet and technology’s influence over changing the concept of materiality, and the creation of fantastic alternative realities.

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3 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
This curatorial vision was reproduced in Cory Arcangel’s work, *Super Mario Clouds* (Figure 9). Cory Arcangel/Beige, born in 1978 and based in New York, included *Super Mario Clouds*, a hacked version of Super Mario Bros created originally in 2002, with all visual elements removed except for the iconic scrolling clouds against the blue sky. The installation was projected in a wide, empty space that emphasized its vacancy and banality amongst many other drawings and paintings that were mostly “color, flash, and fun”. Taking up the walls behind and adjacent to the viewer, *Super Mario Clouds* created an area within the biennial that was fantastic amongst works that may have been considered as returning to traditional media.

Despite the contrast between *Super Mario Clouds* and the other more traditional works presented, Arcangel emphasized the conventional idea of crafting the machine rather than the software itself, often programming his works with the simplest coding language available. Arcangel’s works, which carried the aesthetic of computer technology from the 1970s and 80s, reflected the themes of nostalgia and intergenerational dialogue. The biennial invited artists of all ages to encompass the diverse approaches to process, materiality, conceptual strategies, technology, and history over the course of three generations. Arcangel’s refusal to participate in the growing consumer culture, paired with the modesty of the outdated, low-tech media of his works, suggested a certain distance from the current culture. The pervasive placement of hope in and questioning of the capabilities of technology throughout the exhibition reflected widespread uncertainty about the future in 2004. Arcangel’s refusal to participate in the growing consumer culture, paired with the modesty of the outdated, low-tech media of his works, suggested a reaction against the slickness associated with the late 1990s and society’s skeptical attitude towards technology.

In his space at the Biennial, Arcangel opened possibilities for physical structures to be completely redefined through machinery; they evoked characteristics of an augmented reality. However this very redefinition and hyper-technological existence also elicited a pervasive sense of loss of “real life” and facilitated the search for new forms of connection, community, and meaning in contemporary culture and contemporary art, which the biennial

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attempted to address. Despite the skepticism of the population during that time, there was hope in and anticipation of the Internet’s potential to recreate communities in a complex, multidimensional world seen as fluid, chaotic, and ambiguous. The Internet is a powerful medium for the development of both the individual and the collective, as well as a space that shapes new cultural practices and political expressions. However, there is a pervasive paradox of being connected yet distant, as new ideas for community formed because of the “remote immediacy” of technology. The flat blue sky and drifting, pixelated clouds in Super Mario Clouds constantly remind the viewer of the coinciding alienation of the individual in the technological age. Thus, the question arose: was technology capable of ushering in the interconnected, utopian vision of the 2004 biennial?

The 2004 biennial was generally well-received and praised as “easily the best in some time” by the New York Times. It carried a polite, utopian streak and an emphasis on youth, reflecting the coming of cultural change. Cory Arcangel, who began his series as an underground art project, reached unprecedented fame and was hailed as a catalyst for the development of video game artworks. Although the show was easy to like, the Brooklyn Rail claimed that it never moved beyond decorative and was more like a showroom, appealing to mass audiences, rather than eliciting thought-provoking ideas. However, the digestible content of the biennial, which drew from the context of the populace’s concerns and desires for stability during the period, continued to create a foundation and set an example for fresh, innovative works. Cory Arcangel himself was preeminent in the breakthrough of video game works into the American art scene, and set a precedent for many later new media artists.

The 2014 Whitney Biennial could be considered the answer to the 2004 chapter’s question and a call for a hopeful future and coexistence with technology. Changing its earlier practice, the biennial brought in three external curators, Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms, and Michelle Grabner, with two in-house curators acting as advisors. For this last show in the Breuer building before the Whitney Museum’s move to its current downtown location, each curator was given a floor, inducing the impression of three different exhibitions with distinct points of view while remaining as one biennial exhibition. They acknowledged each curator’s subjective positions and were reluctant to “define, summarize, and systemize current artist practices.” Instead, they invited viewers to experience the selected art in a purer, less filtered

Ibid.
Ibid.
Michael Kimmelman. "Touching All Bases at the Biennial."
Ibid.
Nick Stillman, and Megan Heuer. "2004 Whitney Biennial."
The content and structure of each floor differed, leading to a wide variety of artists grouped together.

Michelle Grabner, a working artist, emphasized curating as a curriculum and exhibition as a classroom. She hoped to reveal to the audience what art did, not what it meant. Her floor contained the most artists; the broad range of works demanded participation and analysis from the viewers. Grabner described what she assembled as a “type of bricolage, erasing the edges and boundaries between the artists and viewers.”, That was reflected in her section of the catalogue: conversations with diverse colleagues, friends, critics, artists and strangers. Diego Leclery, born in 1978 in France but based in New York, enacted a site-specific performance called *Me Playing Civilization*. Leclery played the Real-Time Strategy (RTS) game *Civilization* under the bridge that led to the entrance of the Whitney site eight hours each day for the run of the exhibition (Figure 10). The game allowed players to develop a civilization from its founding and conquer other empires or get defeated by them. The concept of Leclery’s performance piece concentrated on how he confronted the biennial and art world and his experience of being a “post-studio” artist in New York. Post-studio practice is the method of making artwork in the street or outside the traditional studio, as is done with graffiti art, hacktivism, and art intervention. He viewed his ordeal in black and white terms. He could earn a living from his art, which would transform the activity he had been doing for the previous year and a half into an artistic endeavor, or depend on other sources of income, rendering his time spent fruitless and unproductive. Leclery viewed his participation in the biennial as another battle between success as a full-time artist or defeat at the hands of the critics and audiences. His performance aligned with Grabner’s vision to compel and engage the audience to think critically about his work. Although he appeared simply to be playing video games, he was in constant dialogue and experimentation with his audience and the institution representing him. He utilized civilization— a gathering place for cultural activities with an established system of writing – as a metaphor within the Whitney’s “ceremonial cultural centre” by viewing the Whitney as the peak of the art pyramid. Leclery pondered living as an artist and his desire to own his wasted time in his life by transforming it into an artistic creation. He believes art is currently

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
in stagnation, and like civilization, if it does not change or innovate it will inevitably be destroyed.  

His work examines the way cultural material is constantly being sampled and remixed. He seeks answers to questions that vary and shift: Who is the artist, the author, or the maker? The game Civilization alone is a commercial product, yet Leclery utilizes the game and transforms it into a work of his own, stripping its initial purpose and replacing it with his own narrative. This process is reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades, which transformed ordinary objects into art through minimal changes or the addition of his signature. Early developers of the art game, a genre of video games produced with an emphasis on the artist’s intent and reaction of the its players, have especially resonated with this concept of video games as a readymade or found object. However, it can also be argued that the game itself was already an artwork, reintroducing the perpetual question of what can be considered art. Despite the incorporation of many different traditional artistic expressions in the creative process of a video game, the proposition that video games are works of art has been controversial due to their commercial appeal and choice-driven narratives. Furthermore, the title of artist and the question of who would be considered the artist come into play in Civilization. Leclery does not consider himself to be an artist and leaves the decision of his title as an artist up to the audience and critics. Leclery’s performance examines several issues that remain relevant and significant.

The 2014 biennial received, an overall, lukewarm reception and a good deal of criticism. Michelle Grabner’s exhibit was denounced as a saturated pileup of works curated together without a distinct disposition. The 2014 biennial was also criticized for a lack of diversity by a group of predominantly black and queer artists known colloquially as the Yams Collective, claiming that only 9 out of 109 artists were black or African. As a protest against the Museum’s policies, artists within the collective withdrew participation. Leclery’s performance specifically was criticized as “snubbing the audience” and a selfish fulfillment of creative desires devoid of art world relevance. Exiled from the galleries, Leclery futilely retaliated against the Museum system and notion of art productivity. Ironically however, it was his Whitney inclusion itself that sublimated his act of escapism into legitimacy. Many

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
critics added into their reviews of the biennial that contemporary art had become boring, stagnant, and commercialized, stuck in a cycle of continuous change that had now become tiring.29 However, Leclery’s criticisms aligned with these criticisms of contemporary art. Ironically, the very criticisms given to Leclery for his escapism and woeful predictions for contemporary art’s future reveal larger issues within the art world that he attempted to address.

The 2004 Biennial focused on the increasing rise of and dependence on technology. It placed great hope in cyberspace’s potential to reconceptualize space and possibilities for new communities through the internet and technology. The 2014 Biennial, on the other hand, focused on the change in materiality that had concerned the viewers during 2004 and on engaging viewers to talk and discuss with the artists. The 2014 Biennial can be viewed as an answer to that of 2004 through the dialogue between Leclery and Arcangel’s works.

Both Leclery and Arcangel utilized video games in their works, but for very different purposes, focusing on inverse aspects of their machinery. Arcangel emphasized the importance of the complete mastery of understanding the fixed architecture and personality of computers prior to any creative exploration. All his works carry a rigorous conceptual approach to the use of computer hardware and the relationship between humans and machines. Leclery, on the contrary, focused on the software itself and conceptualized it by drawing parallels to his experiences in the art world. The idea of community is a recurring theme in both the 2004 Biennial and Me Playing Civilization and the latter embodies the 2004 Biennial’s hope for a community within the Internet space. Yet the motif of alienation and distance in these communities examined in Super Mario Clouds is still prevalent and a growing and controversial. Arcangel’s and Leclery’s works are opposite sides of the same coin, revealing negative and positive externalities of video games, respectively. However, Arcangel does not hold the same dark view of digital culture that his work displays and believes in the community, entertainment, and escape that video game software offers to its players.30

Through the recurrent inclusion of experimental and new media artists, the 2014 Biennial exhibited the continual rapid progression in technology and dematerialization of the art object.

The disparity of success between artists who utilize video game components in their works at gallery showings and Diego at the 2014 Whitney Biennial may bring confusion and doubt about the Biennial’s ability to show relevant and engaging work. However, the

29 Benjamin Sutton, "Critical Reduction: The 2014 Whitney Biennial."
contrast of Diego’s work reiterates and reflects the aim to display new, experimental artists. The criticisms Leclery and the Biennial received parallel the initial criticisms that the 1993 Whitney Biennial was given. As new and experimental works, they created confusion and uncertainty in their viewers. Yet despite initial criticisms, the 1993 Biennial is now revered as essential and integral to Biennial history. Like the critics of the 1993 Biennial, the critics of the 2014 edition responded to this change in exhibited art, claiming that contemporary art is overproduced, over-commercialized, empty, and dying.

The use of computerized game mechanics has become increasingly pervasive globally in the art world. There have also been separate biennials dedicated to computer games and related technologies, such as the B3 Biennial of the Moving Image, which aims to offer an international platform for the discourse and networking of television and film-makers, artists, designers, scholars, technology providers, and industry participants. The development of virtual reality (VR) could also change and even deconstruct exhibition spaces. The Timothy Taylor Gallery in London challenged what is reality through the juxtaposition of the tangible and virtual components of Shezad Dawood’s exhibition, “Kalimpong,” that involves a VR reconstruction of the small town Kalimpong in West Bengal where the landscape and scenarios change depending on the user’s actions, thereby making each user’s journey unique (Figure 11). The 2017 Whitney Biennial also included video game design as one of the exhibited media on the site display; it was not included in the descriptions of previous Whitney Biennial installations, foreshadowing the growing presence of video games in new media works.\(^3\) Despite what has been claimed, contemporary art is not dying; it is in the process of transformation. Through technology, a vast new sector of space, object, and interaction has been opened and will continue to change the ways in which art is perceived by its audience.

Figure 11. Dawood, Shezad. Kalimpong, 2016 VR Environment.
References


About Us

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Dec 15th, 1944, 11 AM, Kazuko Fujii, Hom Left Behind

Omer Ben-Zvi, 2017

Ink and Image
Department of Art History
New York University
Edition 9, Spring 2017