

DEAR DEMOCRACY...

Ed Andrade
Alex Fernández
Gina Goico
Alain Licari
Yali Romagoza
Luis Stephenberg

Curator:
Alexis Mendoza

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Alexis Mendoza

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Alain Licari, from the series "Limbo (Tijuana)". Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

DEAR DEMOCRACY...

We are living in a very complex society. It placed us in a complex state of thinking.

Ai Weiwei

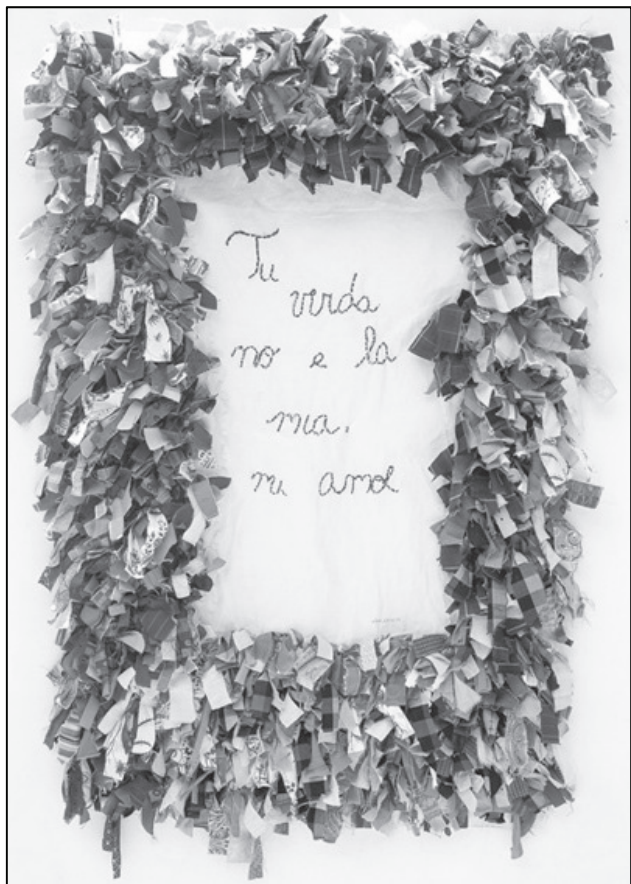
What is the scope and impact of socio-political art? As Theodor W. Adorno famously wrote, — all art is an uncommitted crime—, meaning that art challenges the status quo by its very nature. Thus it can be argued that all art is political in the sense that it takes place in a public space and engages with an already existing ideology and dominant discourse. Yet, art can often become dangerously and explicitly political and serve as a powerful weapon. Throughout the history of social movements and social revolt, art has always reacted against oppression, violence, injustice and inequalities. Addressing socio-political issues and challenging the traditional boundaries and hierarchies imposed by those in power, art can open up the space for the marginalized to be seen and heard and contribute to the social change by producing knowledge and solidarity or simply raising awareness.

This exhibition explores these issues and others as if this is the only conversation we

should be having. Or rather, I think it's the conversation, which unlocks all other conversations. Whether you want to stop the violence, save the planet, express your concerns regarding education, healthcare, or the economy: none of these things can happen unless our governmental system is equipped for the future. Democracy in its current form is largely assumed to be representative; this made sense back in the day, in a world where pen and paper were the most advanced technologies. But still, once every four years, they open up the bandwidth and let a load of decisions go through the pipes. But old bureaucracies couldn't cope with that for long. The nuance of each part of the conversation like immigration, the economy, environment protection, social justice, politics...etc. are so much more complex. Having a say in those subjects would be direct democracy.

Art becomes a powerful weapon, a loud voice, and the anti-propaganda. So my perspective has largely moved from talking about the same media fanfare, to thinking that we're just talking about the wrong thing. We're talking about the opinions of two people or two parties, when we could be questioning the underlying system itself and questioning why we're using the same system as we had in the early 1800s. The complexity of the world today can't go through old indirect forms of decision-making. It's just too binary and slow. The nuance and speed comes, as with everything else the artworks

have touched. "Dear Democracy:" is just an examination of today's most important issues from the artist's perspective. In this way, the personal life and work of the artist transcends the individual and speak meaningfully to a larger audience bringing together the political and human functions of art. Since many variations of socio-political can be found throughout the history, it is difficult to establish the beginning of this politically engaging artistic expression. Activist, conceptual artist and performance artist were majorly influenced by Dada, an anti-war movement which used satire, non-rational and anti-idealistic discourse to critique the First World War and its capitalist agenda. Some of the other early examples of socio-political art include the Mexican muralist movement, very active in left-wing politics in the beginning of the 20th century and wanted to reach hard-working Mexicans through art. When it comes to fine art, Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) based on the Spanish Civil War and capturing its atrocities and inhumanity, served as an inspiration for the modern human rights movement. War was often a motivating factor for artists, also providing the metaphor for the more general exercise of power. The project underscores the empowering potential of civilian action while questioning the very notion of "democratization." This exhibition offers alternative strategies for engaging with and obtaining information about local socio-political distribution and the varies ways in the witch the society is changing.



Gina Goico, "Pelliza Para el Hogar". Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

The relationships, dreams, hopes, and cultural values that support the voyage are given a voice within Gina Goico artworks and installations examines cultural transformation. - Expanding on Epicurus' idea that "nothing is lost, everything is transformed. Goico's work focuses on capturing physical gestures and temporal traces. She aims to reveal the transformative existence of life, to bring about the underlying order of nature and to raise questions about mobility, portability and labor gendering. Through the tactile, visceral experience of making art using the hands, the structural world, usually invisible to the naked eye, is revealed. Gina Goico is interested in material transformation and continuity.

Goico's installation transforms a vacant space into something unique and beautiful without any outside materials, unfamiliar place with minimal material possessions, and transforms the existing area into a beautifully unique neighborhood laden with culture. - The base of her work is the emotional history of things. It's not about the geographical or physical history, but more about the value we give to what we own/keep/cherish from the landscapes/places we come from, and that we keep with us through crossroads. Those symbols that seem to breed from the memory of our heritage. Goico have been using the text as her personal tool/star/instrument related to tradition and visual history; and one of the most public of signs, words, phrases as a symbol to represent

the intimate side of a communal activity as it is to feel, to remember and to interpret. Gina Goico long time theme in her work have been women and girl's rights – from equal pay and land ownership rights to sexual rights, freedom from violence, access to education, and maternal health rights – will true equality exist. She also explores women's leadership and peacemaking roles and have an equal political voice. Also a focus in her work is the situation of women's standing in Dominican society ultimately has not improved and, in fact, has worsened in last few years. This is illustrated in her work by the issues of female employment, gender violence, and sex tourism on the island.



Alex Fernández, "Voter Suppression". Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

Alex Fernández himself raises the need to conduct a thought without image whose first task would be precisely the image criticize thinking and postulates that it implies. Such criticism would release by the thought of his alleged good nature according to the truth of being there with him in the moment, to show that thinking only works from a traveling beyond the compound meanings existing. Suggesting resignation and the way it pre-exist and hindering the deployment of its power. In this regard, we must be clear that the history of art within the social context cannot disconnect from the environment of art society, why it is necessary to interact with these disciplines that help the integral formation of an artist/communicator. Naturally, the delimitation of caring for each area so that no one comes to absorb the other. By breaking through the barriers of the material world, Alex Fernández's printmaking becomes a communication tool of images between cultures. The artist believes that there is a range of ways to approach an artwork: From a strictly rational point of view, where we look for the signified, asking for answers or explanations, to a more emotional one that comes through sensations, with nothing to explain or understand, nothing to be interpreted, just open to the intensities that emanate from the work. It took him a few years to realize that besides political, social or moralizing work, it was also possible to make art with a strong aesthetic component, work that obeys impulses and sensations. It is not

senseless, since it comes from a process of thought like every creative act; but instead of trying to illustrate a concept or idea, it is the idea, it is the concept that comes through the hand in the form of a drawing, or as simple as taking over an entire room. A predictable intention to tell the story and remembered it. It is a constant search, not of answers, but of certain satisfaction, and of an alleged reason of tradition when we believe to have one through the repetitions of patterns, which lead us to an apparently safe and happy history-.

Alex Fernández with this body of work addresses the role of the current United States' government. The new series of woodcuts and linocuts examines the concept of corruption in American history; tracing the term corruption to its roots. Systematic corruption embodied the idea that political actors manipulated the economic system to create economic rents that politicians could use to secure control of the government. In other words, politics corrupts economics. Fernández also address issues related to police brutality, voting fraud, and human rights.

Ed Andrade explore the deplore that corruption undermines the enjoyment of human rights and, concomitantly, employ human rights as a normative framework to denounce and combat corruption. But the human rights-based approach has been criticized as vague and over-reaching. Addressing this controversy,

Andrade in his latest work try to examine the legal quality of the assumed 'link' between corruption and human rights more closely. It specifically asks the dual question whether and under what conditions corrupt acts or omissions can technically be qualified as an actual violation of international human rights (doctrinal analysis of the positive law) and whether corruption should be conceptualized as a human rights violation (normative assessment). The answer is that such a reconceptualization is legally sound as a matter of positive analysis, although very difficult doctrinal problems arise. The normative assessment is ambivalent, but the practical benefits of the conceptualization seem to outweigh the risks of reinforcing the anti-Western skepticism towards the fight against corruption and of overblowing human rights. The imperial control, the framing of corruption not only as a human rights issue but even as a potential human rights violation.

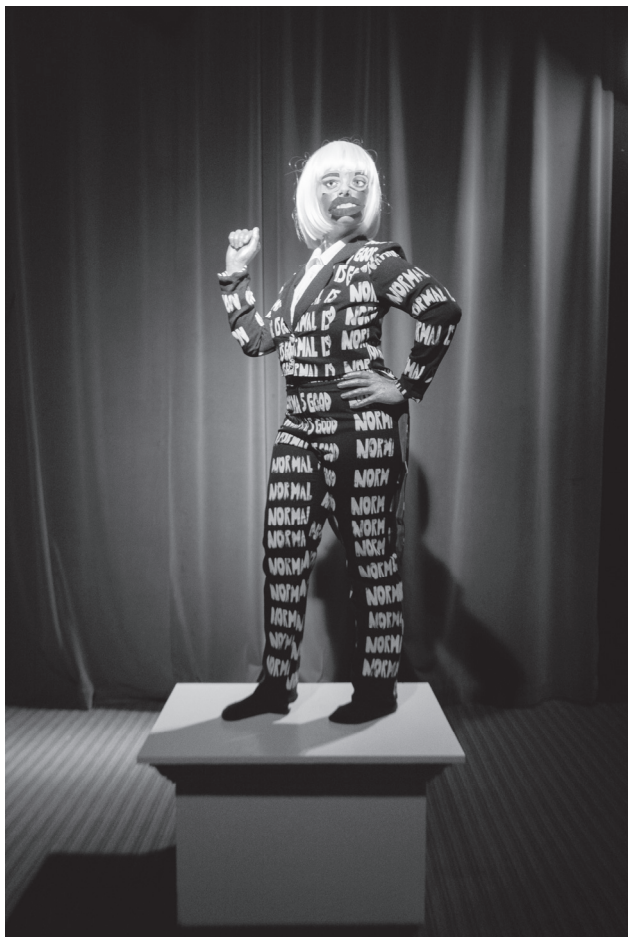
Artworks related to international migration (including refugees) should be capable of explaining the scale, direction and composition of population movements that cross boundaries. Alain Licari try to document and investigate the factors which determine the decision to move and the choice of destination, the characteristic modes of social integration in the receiving country and the eventual outcome, including remigration and return movements. His studies of international migration have not attempted such an

ambitious agenda. Licari's research has generally focused on specific aspects, such as the demographic characteristics of immigrants, migration decision-making, economic and social adaptation in receiving countries, the policies of sending and receiving countries, or global trends in population movement. Empirical studies have been conducted on an ad hoc basis, largely uninformed by developments in general sociological theory. In the other hand Luis Stephenberg have yet to incorporate the phenomenon of growing conflict between countries over population movements into their understanding of international migration and international relations. Stephenberg in this exhibition advances and analyzes three propositions: (1) aspects and influences, actions or inactions vis-a-vis international migration; (2) governments affect international migration through their rules for the exit and entry of peoples; and (3) international migrants often become a political force in the country in which they reside. Stephenberg open the discussion about emerging issues of national and international policy leads to a fourth proposition--namely, that the internationalization of migration issues has introduced new and conflicting interests into considerations of policies affecting migration in both sending and receiving countries.



Luis Stephenberg, Untitled, mixed media installation. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

As a visual artist Yali Romagoza strives to create a narrative in her work that is both personal and universal. She narrates the story of the human condition by presenting pieces of a story, fragments of the whole, fill in the blank faces and characters. Art-Action forms that imply the human understanding that would be within the work and the story, which that body of work tells. It is simply dimensional expression that symbolizes creativity, our natural ability to actualize what we need. Her work represents choices and free will —being both strong and fragile—. The destruction and resurrection are the solution that finds Romagoza to solve the complex challenge of building up an "artistic work" without generating at the same time a work of art to come to interrupt the free flow of time. Her work overwhelmingly explore social identity, she examine and predicts certain intergroup behaviors on the basis of perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to move from one group to another. This contrasts with occasions where the term "social identity theory" is used to refer to general theorizing about human social selves. Moreover, and although some researchers have treated it as such, social identity theory was never intended to be a general theory of social categorization. It was awareness of the limited scope of social identity theory that led Romagoza to develop a theory in the form of self-categorization theory,



Yali Romagoza, Monument to the Great Living Artist, 2018, Performance. Duration of 9:26 min. Photo by Javier Caso

which built on the insights of social identity theory to produce a more general account of self and group processes. The term social identity approach, or social identity perspective for Romagoza, is suggested for describing the joint contributions of both social identity theory and self-categorization theory.

In conclusions by presenting these very different projects in one exhibition, we hope to highlight two important aspects of the artistic engagement. Firstly, we wish to frame the current discourse on the topics within its historical context and begin to delineate a social change for this process. Secondly, we wish to formulate the practice of a collaborative point of view from different artists. There is an enduring and powerful relationship between contemporary art, social justice and political art. However, "Dear Democracy" try to shine a light on the current functioning of global society violates each of the definitions almost completely, and therefore expresses the lack of and need for social justice in all areas of the world, especially developing nations. The intersection of arts and political activism are two fields defined by a shared focus of creating engagement that shifts boundaries, changes relationships and creates new paradigms. The artists presented in this project are both activist and artist, their work focus in the challenges of the unknown and the unpredictable, never truly able to determine the outcome and forever questioning if there is more to be done. This

experimentation also forms the essence of what can be the engine of success and motivation towards true change whether we are immersed in a specific social cause or a global peace movement, writing an essay, sharing a story by means of carving a sculpture, or using performance to highlight a critical message. Whatever our chosen palette, the practice of understanding the importance of our own creative engagement is a source of potential change on its own, and a space where valuable insight can be found through reflection and sharing.

Ed Andrade



Ed Andrade, "Empire", Mixed Media on Wood Panel.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

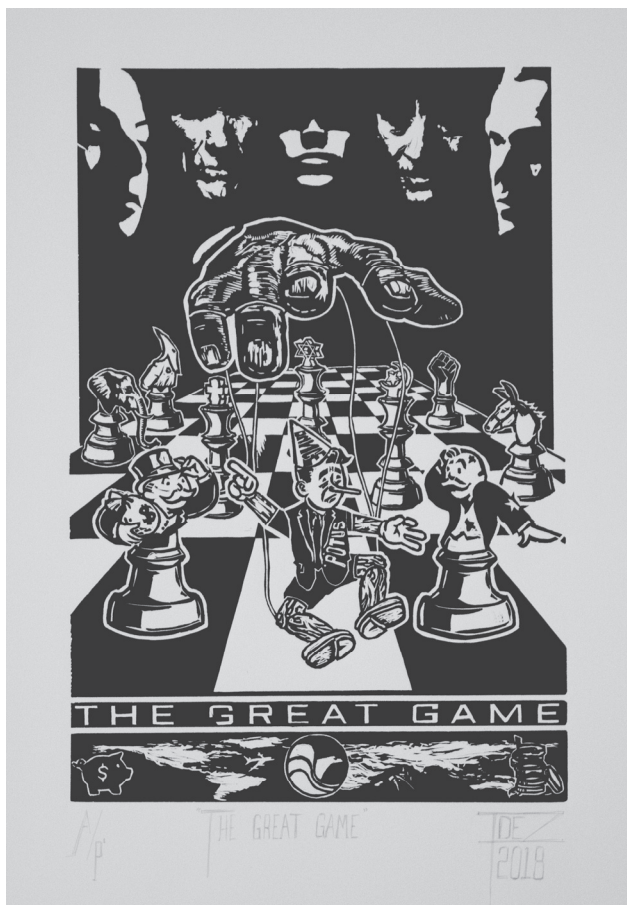


Ed Andrade, "Manipulation One on One", Mixed Media on Wood Panel. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

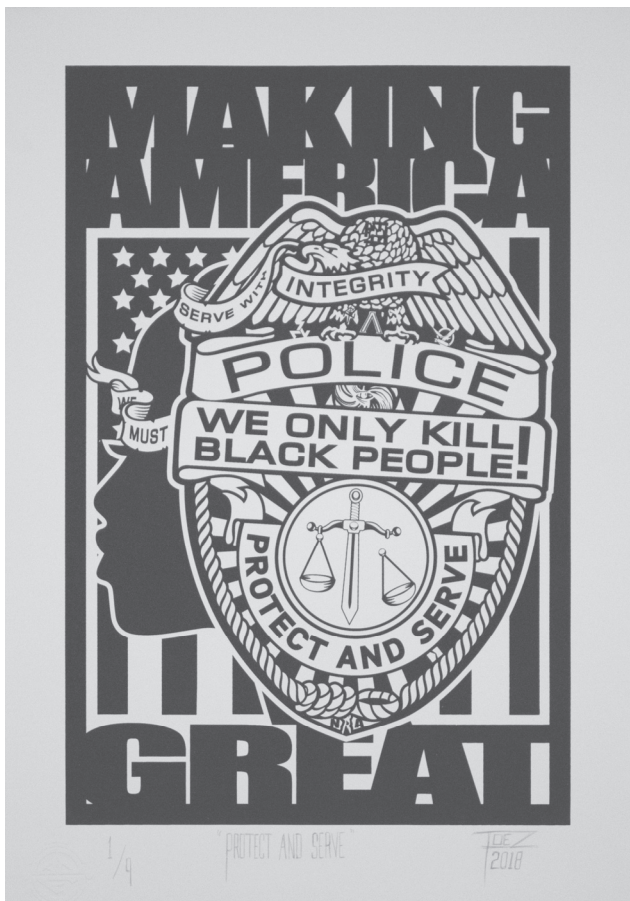
Alex Fernández



Alex Fernández, "Allegory of the Destruction of Man", Woodcut.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Alex Fernández, "The Great Game, Tribalism Politics", Woodcut.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Alex Fernández, "Protect and Serve", Woodcut. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

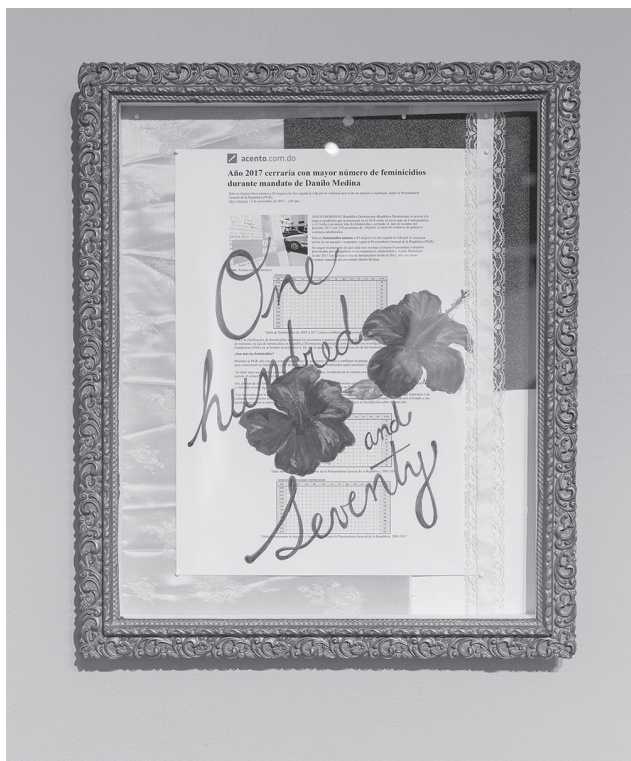
Gina Goico



Gina Goico, 2018, From the series "Aquí & Ahora", Mixed Media.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Gina Goico, 2018, From the series "Aquí & Ahora", Mixed Media.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Gina Goico, 2018, One Hundred and Seventy, From the series "Aquí & Ahora", Mixed Media. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

Alain Licari



Alain Licari, from the series "Limbo (Tijuana)". Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Alain Licari, from the series "Limbo (Tijuana)". Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Alain Licari, from the series "Like Birds on a Wire". Photo
Courtesy of the Artist.



Alain Licari, from the series "Like Birds on a Wire". Photo
Courtesy of the Artist.

Yali Romagoza



Yali Romagoza, "90 Miles", 2018, Living art Installation/Performance (Variable Dimensions) Photo Print on Aluminum, 20" x 24" inches. Performance duration 57 min. Alter-ego (Cuquita, The Cuban Doll), suitcase, personal belongings, clothing, letters from family, gifts from lover, ticket plane one-way Havana-Miami, Granma newspaper, planet globe earth world balloons. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

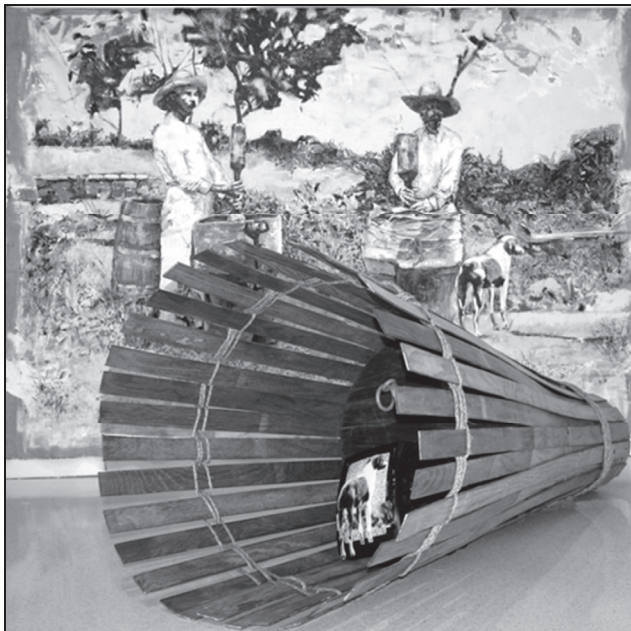


Yali Romagoza, From the Series "The Emancipation of Cuquita the Cuban Doll" (The Interview), 2019, Performance and 3 Photo print on Aluminum, Variable Dimensions. Performance Duration 10:36 min. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Yali Romagoza, "Meditating my way out of Capitalism and Communism". 12410 days of Isolation, 2018, Public Action/Performance. Duration of 6 hours. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

Luis Stephenberg



Luis Stephenberg, "Archetype Repertory", Mixed Media Installation. Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Luis Stephenberg, "Hat Salesmen", Mixed Media Installation.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.



Luis Stephenberg, "Personal History", Mixed Media Installation.
Photo Courtesy of the Artist.

SOCIAL-POLITICAL ART...

...A wall is a very big weapon. It's one of the nastiest things you can hit someone with...

Banksy

1

Work on politics and art is based on the assumption that art “plays a formative role in the constitution of social life, in the ways in which people take responsibility for creating their own histories, for participating in the management of their own social and political realities.” This role can be analyzed from an art theoretical and art historical point of view, but also from the point of view of political science. Art can be understood as a form of, or contribution to, political discourse; as a descriptive, interpretive, or explicitly critical approximation; or as a vehicle with which to transcend the political. Art’s contribution to political discourse can also be analyzed. Reflecting the (inter)textual turn, the pictorial turn, and the aesthetic turn in the social sciences, the relationship between politics and art has been analyzed in a huge number of academic studies, all of which engage with and expand the limits of research in political

science. These studies understand art narrowly as fine art, address their subject matter from a popular culture point of view, or call into question the aptness of the distinction between fine art and popular art/culture. Especially with regard to participatory projects in photography, graffiti, and street or open-access art, a narrow analytical focus on fine art and the museum would miss some of the most important trends in current culture work performed by citizen artists, who put as much emphasis on “being a citizen” as they do on “being an artist.” Here, new political agents emerge and contribute to the constitution of social and political life in a manner insusceptible to traditional political analysis. Looking beyond fine art also seems to be mandatory with regard to photography and the visual arts. Visual image production is characterized by increasing overlap between photojournalism and art photography, with a number of photographers moving freely among subgenres or producing a body of work that does not easily fit into either category. The new phenomena of citizen photographers and independent documentary photographers also necessitate rethinking the operating procedures and typologies of photography. Indeed, there can be observed a “blurring of genre boundaries,” which makes insistence on established typologies seem anachronistic. Photography as an everyday activity performed by more people than ever before also requires rethinking of fundamental questions: Why do people photograph? Why do people take so

many photographs? Why does photography matter? What is photography? These are profoundly political questions in connection with visual politics in general and the politics of photography in particular. Indeed, “How we now—today—understand what photography is and how it works tells us something about how we understand anything. And it may appear that how we understand anything is not unrelated to how photography works.”

Art is political if it complicates, not simplifies, and if it “extends the thread of recognition and understanding beyond what previously was seen and known.” Art is political also if it reinterprets “what previously was seen and known” so that alternative understandings may emerge. These reinterpretations help reveal existing power relations within society, determining what previously was known and what was deemed worthy of analysis in the first place and identifying what previously was not seen and—therefore? —not known, including identification of what should be seen or known. There is a critical ingredient, and there is a moral ingredient, in much artistic work and also in many studies on politics and art. Art—and artists—may seek to catalyze political change. Artists may engage with political movements and humanitarian organizations, but they also may catalyze political change without joining or explicitly supporting political movements. Artists may be political without attempting to be political (in extremis: art cannot but be political),

whereas those artists who want to exert political influence may fail. Art may include a utopian element. Nicholas Mirzoeff, for example, explicitly demands “utopian imagining” as “a necessary cultural response to the gloom-laden chorus that there is no alternative to the current doctrine of pre-emptive war and the politics of fear.” What was always includes what could have been; what is always includes the—as yet unrealized—potentialities of what could be. Revealing what could be and, by so doing, potentially altering the discursive frames within which politics is negotiated, is one of the things that art and political analysis of art can do.

Art is critical if, as Michael Shapiro suggests, it transcends “the mere recognition of established opinion or the extrapolation from established versions of facticity.” Writing from a different theoretical perspective, Chantal Mouffe defines as critical those artistic practices that “can contribute to unsettling the dominant hegemony” by “bringing to the fore the existence of alternatives to the current post-political order.” Art, then, is not critical if it merely reconstructs or anticipates the motives of the political elite. Such reconstruction or anticipation, however, is a political act. Thus, art can be political without being critical (as defined above), but it cannot be critical without being political. Research on politics and art reveals the politically progressive potentialities of art and the progressive politics of artists without ignoring the fact that artistic manifestations may

also (appear to) support repressive and violent politics. This work analyzes works of art that are critical of the existing social order but also artworks that affirm this very order. Indeed, there is no reason to assume that artists and artworks are necessarily progressive and critical. There is no reason to assume, either, that artists and artworks can achieve what other social agents fail to achieve. There is, however, reason to assume that such binaries as critical-uncritical or political-unpolitical obscure more than they reveal. And given art's interpretive openness, there is also reason to assume that the search for a work of art that is universally regarded as "critical" or "political" will, in all likelihood, be in vain.

Research on art is based on the assumption that art gives us something that other human endeavors cannot give us. Otherwise, we would not need art. Art—and political analysis of art—may pave the way from the given—or the said-to-be-given—to the possible. Jacques Rancière emphasizes that "images of art ... help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought," but they do so only "on condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated." Art, thus, may move—and make audiences move—from what is or what is said to be to what may be or could be or even, normatively, should be. Indeed, artists often assume a normative position, accepting "the ethnographic and political responsibilities of the witness: to speak with, in dialogue with,

those are [sic] who are the chosen subjects of representation in order to best represent the interests of those subjects.” This may be what many artists wish to achieve; as such, it is laudable. It is, however, problematic, as those “subjects” do not always ask artists to represent them. Furthermore, why should artists be expected to be capable of both identifying their subjects’ interests and best representing these very interests? Arguably, in a world “where individuals are spoken for, much more than they speak in their own name,” subjects might want to represent themselves and to speak—literally and figuratively—for themselves. They may wish to be agents of their own image rather than being represented by an artist, regardless of the artist’s motives. Participatory projects offer many possibilities to do this (within limits).

What I am offering in this contribution is neither an intellectual nor a disciplinary history of work in political science (loosely defined) on art and aesthetics, nor yet another defense of such work. Bernadette Buckley has clarified that, from a philosophical-cultural perspective, the “aesthetic does not need to legitimate itself in relation to any presumed to be ‘more real’ realm of political science or international relations.” In three sections I review and analyze three important current issues in the research on politics and art in political science: (1) politics, art, and knowledge; (2) politics, art, and violence; and (3) politics, art, and peace. The

first section is divided into three parts: on method, words and images, and quantity and quality. The second section is also presented in three parts: art and violence, visibility and invisibility, and representing the aftermath. The third section also is divided into three parts: from aftermath to peace, activism and participation, and memory remix. Much more can be said about the questions addressed in the sections and subsections and also about many other issues excluded from this article. My focus in this contribution is on the visual arts, very broadly understood, including photojournalistic image production. Any number of references could be given to substantiate the claim that within the overall field of politics and art, work on politics and visual art is particularly timely and important. More than twenty years ago, W. J. T. Mitchell wrote:

Certainly I would not be the first to suggest that we live in a culture dominated by pictures, visual simulations, stereotypes, illusions, copies, reproductions, imitations, and fantasies.... [However,] we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them.

Regardless of the huge amount of work done in the meantime to answer some of Mitchell's—and other—questions, there still is much we do

not know about images and their operation “on the world.” Thomas Keenan writes, “If, today, actions in the political realm are rarely unaccompanied by images, the force and import—the gravity—of those images cannot simply be taken for granted.” That which cannot be taken for granted—the gravity of images, the gravity of art—has to be, and can be, analyzed. Although the focus in this contribution is on visual images, I suggest that questions such as the ones asked by Mitchell can also be asked with regard to other artistic genres. I hope this contribution is useful not only to readers with an interest in visual art and visual images but also to readers interested in the overall configurations of politics and art and to those with an interest in artistic genres other than visual ones.

2

Analysis of politics and art is essentially pluralistic and multidisciplinary, and pluralism and multidisciplinary come in many forms. Post structuralism and feminism have shown interest in art and visual representation since the 1980s. These approaches identified gaps and omissions in international relations theory; challenged the established, predominantly male culture of political analysis; and helped establish the use, in political science, of methods and approaches borrowed from other disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and visual studies. Methodologically, work on politics and art

unashamedly borrows from, for example, art history and theory, media and communication studies, film studies, semiotics, and discourse analysis, while “collaborative work with artists and practitioners” is still the exception. Thus the body of work on politics and art in political science is different from such work in other disciplines, not necessarily in that it is based on methodological approaches specifically tailored to the analysis of politics and art, but rather in that the explanandum is derived from political science and often linked to questions of power, violence, war, interests, and—increasingly—identities. This is also one of the limitations, because work on politics and art tends to follow wider trends, which can be observed in more established areas of social research and in the social and political world. For example, there is a substantial body of work in international relations and security studies on art’s operation in violent conditions, offering political interpretations of art (and culture) in the context of violence, terrorism, and war. However, reflecting international relations’ focus on large-scale violence and interstate war and the discipline’s comparatively shallow conceptualizations of peace, there is less interest in art’s operation under conditions of peace, peaceful adjustment, and nonviolent change.

Surely it would be futile to look for the method of work on politics and art in a research area characterized by creative eclecticism. In cultural

studies, different methods can be combined, resulting in “an eclectic (‘multidisciplinary’) approach.” There is no reason to assume that such combinations would not be useful in political analysis as well. Such multidisciplinary can even be based on incompatible approaches. The purpose here is to increase, in a process of “self-reflectiveness,” researchers’ awareness of the intricacies of their subject matter. Work on politics and art also combines academic and nonacademic sources, including artistic ones, and regards these sources—for example, academic philosophy and nonacademic poetry—as equally valuable in terms of knowledge production. Rather than “translating” nonacademic sources into academic language, some authors respect such sources on their own terms and offer little academic commentary. Eckhart Krippendorff, for example, reproduces parts of Jonathan Swift’s and Leo Tolstoy’s work so as to illuminate foreign policy and sources of war.

Other studies combine academic analysis with fictional narratives, thus creatively filling gaps in the available source material and challenging established patterns of analysis and presentation. Other scholars deviate from the standard academic operating procedure of writing books and produce documentary films accompanied by auto-ethnographic writings.

There have been explicit attempts to formulate a theory of visual images from the point of view of political science, but many writings are

theoretically less ambitious, presenting (self-reflective) first-person narratives offering “a particular reading of a particular text from within a particular institutional position.” Such readings, in communication with others and constructively interrogated in the evolving discourse on politics and art, help produce knowledge. Use of aggregate terms such as “people,” “audience,” or “we/us,” treated as unitary actors supposedly acting as the author, based on his or her expert knowledge, expects them to act, offers little satisfaction unless it can be shown that a specific group of people does in fact share the author’s analysis. There is “a measure of indeterminacy in moving from the text ‘in itself’ (as analyzed by the critic) to how it is actually read.” Audience analysis, however, is largely absent from work on politics and art in political science. There are exceptions, however. Images’ operations on observers always employ contextual clues; no image is seen in total isolation. For example, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites’ reading of selected images in the context of US visual culture combines what can be seen in a given image with knowledge derived from sources exterior to the image: for example, that the subject depicted in one photograph (Nick Ut’s photograph titled *Accidental Napalm*) suffers from “napalm burns on her back and arm” cannot be seen in the image; this interpretation, as the authors acknowledge, requires additional information. The extent to which interpretation depends on contextual clues is open to debate,

as is the question of what images are capable of communicating to viewers without such clues. Critics often focus on what images do not tell their viewers without additional information, but they do not often ask what images do tell them without contextual clues. Even without additional information, the photograph discussed by Hariman and Lucaites might touch viewers for a variety of reasons, including the extent of pain it communicates and the indifference, casualness, and business-as-usual attitude of the soldiers depicted in the same image seemingly disregarding the pain of others. This is “a picture that shouldn’t be shown of an event that shouldn’t have happened.” However, because the event did happen, the picture has to be shown, because it reveals something not only about a particular event but also about war in general. What it reveals exactly to individual viewers has to be analyzed.

While images should be analyzed on their own terms, such analysis is impossible due to the inevitable involvement of language in any act of analysis translating what can be seen into what can be said; hence approaches to the study of images derived from discourse analysis. Each person operates within larger discursive formations of which the experience of images is only a part, and no one is exposed only to images. Discourse analysis benefits from established methodologies but addresses images in terms other than their own, thus

disregarding “the necessity of reading photographs, not just the text surrounding them.” Instead of studying “the general field of images and their relation to discourse,” as iconology demands, there is a tendency to reduce the study of the general field of images to the study of their relation to discourse, generating important, but limited, insights into the operation of images in society. As such, discourse analysis offers approximations to images—important ones, but approximations all the same.

Focusing on what can be said or written about an image implies that what cannot be said or written about it escapes attention. Emphasis on text reflects tradition, but also the subordination of the visual to the written prevalent in journalism, whereas in art photography, skepticism about verbal explanations of the visual can be very strong. Emphasis on text ignores that there is something evasive in images, which cannot be grasped by means of words but has to be analyzed all the same if images are to be fully understood. “The social-relational content of the photograph is not simply descriptive-historical, but affective and empathic: in short, it provides an emotional ‘hold.’” Questions pertaining to emotive and affective dimensions of the visual experience, however, are notoriously difficult to grasp; hence the tendency in liberal thought to declare the affective dimensions of art “personal matters.” This designation has the additional

benefits of depoliticizing emotions and strengthening liberal politics by excluding those from full participation who are alleged to be less rational and more emotive.

3

Political analysis of the visual arts includes critical investigation of the connection between what is seen and what is known. However, how do we know what we see? Mitchell explains “that ‘language’ (in some form) usually enters the experience of viewing photography or of viewing anything else.” The knowledge that images are capable of generating is (“usually”) produced by means of language (“in some form”) based on a translation of what we see into what we say or write about what we see. This form of knowledge production requires reflection on the relationship between words and images in general. Addressing images through language means addressing images in terms other than their own. This may be inevitable, but has to be reflected upon all the same. Sociologically, the first question that has to be asked when confronted with written or verbal interpretations of images is “says who?” because “concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality,” visually communicated or otherwise.

Surely the relationship between words and images cannot be reduced to meaning assigned to images by means of words. Peter Gilgen understands this relationship as an

“intellectual stereoscopic effect” and specifies that “the image gains in profile through the verbal information conveyed in the caption; from the accompanying image this information gains persuasive power.” In this understanding, words and images seem intimately connected, equally important and mutually supportive; their relationship “is one of a certain mutual critique.” Other authors insist on the untranslatability of words into images and vice versa. Michel Foucault, for example, argues that “it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say.” Jae Emerling states that “one never sees what one says, and vice versa.” Writing or talking about images, then, can never adequately represent what one sees; like every translation, it is the invention of something new. One of the problems when trying to “say what we see” (Foucault) is that “images and written texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things.” More specifically, “writing contrives to evoke the ordinary features and substructure of an entire scene by implication, and then concentrates its attention on a few notable details.” In visual representation in film and photography, “[w]hat is noted and what is left unnoted form a continuous co-presentation, even when details are singled out for attention.” From this it follows that it is difficult visually to reduce a person to one, and only one, specific subject position, be it a “terrorist,” a “freedom-fighter,” or a “president.” Images testify to “the commonalties of being human.” Discourse

analysis can show the processes in the course of which the multitude of subject positions that each person carries is being reduced to one, dominant subject position, marginalizing intended and unintended connotations. Having little to say about the image as such, however, discourse analysis cannot show what an image shows.

Individuals contextualize images also by means of “pre-existing representational resources,” including images they already carry with them as visual memories derived from their own experience, the culture industry, or, increasingly, photo-sharing forums on the Internet. For example, “[w]hat we see in the movies and on television provides a context and prior set of meanings within and with which we interpret events like the 9/11 attacks.” The photo essayistic tradition in journalism contextualized images by means of other images and constructed powerful visual narratives. This tradition depended on political awareness among readers/viewers and some degree of knowledge acquired prior to the viewing experience; it largely disappeared with the disappearance of such journals as *Life* but is currently being revitalized in online publications. Exclusive focus on images, while an established practice in artists’ monographs, cannot normally be found in academic writings in the social sciences characterized by emphasis on the written word; images, if used at all, often serve the purpose of illustration of

what has already been established by means of text. However, exceptions exist and deserve attention. For example, a book on the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda published by political scientist Scott Straus and photographer Robert Lyons combines “two separate projects of disparate origins, one written and academic, the other visual and aesthetic.” Both parts of the book—the written and the visual—are to some extent autonomous; the written and the visual parts can be regarded on their own terms. However, approaching the photographs as photo-essay may make viewers misunderstand the people depicted and their subject positions during the genocide. It is for this reason that the biographical descriptions at the end of the book are essential, thus undermining the images’ autonomy. Spatially separated from the photographs, the biographical sketches do not necessarily predetermine the viewing experience, thus allowing for some degree of interpretive openness on the part of viewers and complicating the viewing experience. Interpretive openness is not always appreciated. For example, photographer James Nachtwey, who regularly publishes photographs of human suffering without explanatory texts, has been criticized for so doing. His photographs are said to be capable only of triggering “bewilderment and hopelessness,” if not “disgust and contempt,” on the part of viewers.

The absence of more experimental approaches to images in academic writings reflects not only academic conventions but also profound difficulties in connection with nonverbal approaches to the visual. Furthermore, it reflects that even seemingly purely visual narratives require language to assign meaning to them. After all, the experience of watching an image cannot be decoupled from language; all media are mixed media. Pure verbal representation does not exist, and pure visual representation does not exist, either. The issue thus is one of raising awareness about the intricacies of any experience of, and meaning making in connection with, images. Designations of meaning, rather than “encouraging the free play of the spectator’s faculties,” ultimately patronize viewers, denying them the right to independently assign meaning to what they believe they see. Viewers’ independence, however, is precisely what some critical voices fear, suspecting that the visual is either “too open to misinterpretation” or “too engaging, for it draws the viewer into an interpretive relationship that bypasses professional mediation.” Especially in the context of visual representations of human suffering, however, precise contextualization is often required so as not to misrepresent and violate the people depicted. Art photography’s interpretive openness and its insistence on various connotations that images carry with them appear inappropriate when it comes to representations of people in pain (and a

substantial portion of the recent work on politics and art focuses on such representations). It is arguable that in such cases, connotations and designations of meaning other than those intended by the photographer and the subject have to be marginalized by means of captions or other written explanations. It is a balancing act trying to reconcile the interests of the subjects depicted—for example, to be recognized as a victim without being reduced to a victim—and the interests of viewers who want to be addressed as autonomous subjects.

The “excess meaning” images carry with them can always be translated into a multitude of interpretations and designations of meaning for each and every single image. This is not always unproblematic, but it might also be understood as a platform for discursive engagement with what we believe we see. This engagement should not be limited to the issues artists, editors, critics, or anybody else speaking with sufficient authority wishes to discuss.

4

In the digital age, many more images are being produced than ever before. How does this increase in the number of images affect knowledge production? How do viewers cope with the number of images they are regularly exposed to? How can they respond to conditions depicted in images when the mere number of images overwhelms them? Writing in 1927, Siegfried Kracauer speculated that there is something wrong with the assumption that

the more we see, the more we know. In light of illustrated magazines, he noted, "Never before has an age been so informed about itself." But he also observed, "Never before has a period known so little about itself." Kracauer did not understand information provided by illustrations as knowledge: the "blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what the things mean." Writing in 1994, Mitchell speculated that the problem of the twenty-first century might be "the problem of the image," and roughly ten years later, Susan Sontag complained about a world "saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images." And already in the mid-nineteenth century, abolitionist Frederick Douglass had referred to the planet as "a picture gallery." Thus, there is a slightly repetitive element in the photographic discourse, complaining not about the image as such, but rather about the number of images produced at any given point in time. Few images, it seems, do not pose a problem; many do. For example, "hypervisibility"—"constant simulation"—is said to infringe upon the ability to be critical about the image: "We can't manage and digest it, and are thus manipulated by it." In the photographic discourse, there can be observed a huge degree of mistrust of human beings' ability to decide what images to study and regard seriously (just a few) and what images to ignore or to glance at in passing, if at all (the vast majority of images produced at any point in time). This mistrust is neither entirely justified nor entirely logical, as it emphasizes the

quantitative dimension of image production at the expense of qualitative considerations: just because there are more images than individuals can deal with—and there have always been more images than individuals could deal with—does not mean that it is impossible for individuals to engage with selected images; it is a choice, and this choice often reflects the quality of images. Photographic image production cannot be limited to quantitative considerations, but has to include qualitative assessments as well.

It is also argued that (seemingly identical) images of victims “can produce a generalized and standardized visual account that anonymizes victims and depoliticizes conflict.” Images of victims, rather than increasing critical awareness, which can then be transformed into politics—the hope underlying concerned and social documentary work in the visual arts—are said to paralyze viewers and make them politically inactive. This argument can often be found in work on viewers’ exposure to visual, in particular photographic, representations of human suffering. For example, “people may feel so helpless from seeing repetitive shots of horror that they do not want to see more than they are already seeing.” The mere number of published images of human suffering—alleged to be routinely exaggerated—is said to result in dulled and desensitized viewers who increasingly ignore the conditions depicted in images; they are supposed to be too tired to respond to these conditions because they have

the impression—generated by images—that there is nothing they can do anyway. As David Campbell has shown, this argument—especially when it is linked to what is called “compassion fatigue” —is not convincing, because in addition to its incoherence, there is scant empirical evidence to support it. Sontag, who helped establish this idea in her early writings on photography, later criticized it, not only asking for evidence with which to support it, but also arguing that “showing something at its worst ... invites an active response. For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock.” (“Shock can wear off,” however.) Even without evidence, the notion of “compassion fatigue” has become a standard ingredient of the photographic discourse, routinely rehearsed and taken for granted in connection with all sorts of images. More fundamentally, some authors argue that compassion is “a trap. Its limitations give rise to a set of politically repugnant temptations—pity, indifference, cynicism and resentment.” Creating compassion should therefore be replaced with “creating solidarity” as the main aim of documentary photography.

In another variation, this argument is applied to those viewers who are neither depoliticized nor desensitized as a result of their viewing experience, viewers who do not capitulate in light of the number of images of human suffering seemingly communicating helplessness and hopelessness and who would

want to respond to the conditions depicted in images. These viewers, so the argument goes, cannot, whatever they do, respond adequately to conditions of human suffering depicted in images. Political responses to such images would seem to be necessary, because “what has been deemed most intolerable is ... the person who simply notices but does not act.” Acting adequately, however, is said to be impossible, because “one’s response to photographs can do nothing to alleviate the suffering depicted.” This assessment appears convincing with regard to representations of dead bodies: the dead are dead; there is nothing viewers can do to undo these deaths. If an individual’s response to conditions of human suffering depicted in images is adequate only on condition that it alleviates the suffering depicted, then there is in most cases no such thing as an adequate response. This is a very ambitious and ultimately debilitating understanding of adequateness, and there are many possibilities for individuals to respond to conditions depicted in images below the threshold of immediate alleviation of the suffering depicted. A possible response, for example, is acknowledgment of “the relationship between oneself and the depicted other including, arguably, acknowledging the other’s not-so-otherness without, however, and conflating one’s own perception of the depiction of an other’s pain with the other’s physical and mental experience of pain.”

The number of images of human suffering reflects the number of people in pain, and no individual can hope to alleviate the suffering of all of them, visually represented or not. Viewers have to make a choice—one that may be unethical and painful but is unavoidable. Furthermore, the focus on individual viewers and their potential responses disregards the fact that individuals may “act politically as a part of the public,” together with others. If individuals are regarded as parts of the discursively visually constructed public, defined through “common spectatorship” or connected with one another as participants in the visual construction of the world on the basis of a “contract,” then the sum of the individual responses (each of which may be inadequate, in the sense that it does not directly or immediately contribute to the alleviation of the suffering depicted) “may ultimately form an adequate response.” Only as a member of the discursively organized public and as a part of a potential collective action can the individual viewer hope to respond adequately to conditions depicted in images.

5

Artists representing acts of violence are not immune to committing acts of violence while so doing. This assessment reflects an extended understanding of violence, decoupled from mere physical force and close to cultural violence. It is said, for example, that the act of taking a photograph of someone equals an act

of violation: to “photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.” However, why does seeing people “as they never see themselves” constitute an act of violence? After all, as Chinua Achebe notes, “a visitor can sometimes see what the owner of the house has ignored.” Thus, differentiation is required. Achebe, in the same interview, explains that visitors “must visit with respect and not be concerned with the color of skin, or the shape of nose, or the condition of the technology in the house.” Molly Rogers’s analysis of the practice of US American race theorists, who in the mid-nineteenth century had photographs (daguerreotypes) taken of selected slaves shows that the photographic act can indeed be an act of violation:

The experience of being daguerreotyped was unlike any other they [the subjects depicted] had known. No one had asked them whether they wanted their pictures made. They were simply called from the field, the house, the workshop, or the slave quarters, taken into town, and led up the stairs of an unfamiliar building and into rooms with a powerful, dense odor that no perfume could hide.... They were not supposed to be there. However—and this complicates the notion of violence—as was observed at that time by Pearl Cleage Polk when she was photographed:

He would take our pictures and let us see that those who said we were invisible were lying. That those who said we were ugly were lying. Those those who claimed we were less than human were lying. That those who said we did not love each other, and marry, and produce children, and suffer, and grow old were lying.

The photographer] would let us bloom in the safe zone before his camera, and we saw ourselves differently through his lenses. We saw ourselves shining in all our specificity. In all of our generalities. In all our terrible humanness. We saw ourselves just shine.

That the photographer would let his or her subjects “bloom” in the “safe zone” before his or her camera is an unusual approach to photography and the photographer–subject relationship. It is more common to suggest that it is the photographer who operates in a safe zone offered by the camera which protects him or her from the surrounding environment. That the subjects depicted see themselves “just shine” is also an unusual interpretation. It is more common to argue that the photographer, exploiting the subject depicted, attracts the spotlight. Pearl Cleage Polk’s assessment reflects, I think, what David MacDougall had in mind when he wrote that photographs cannot but show the commonalities of being human, regardless of the photographer’s intention. This element of photographic representation is often overlooked in critical assessments focusing on

the violence of the photographic act, just as is the fact that nowadays many subjects ask photographers to take their pictures so as not to become invisible in a world where what cannot be seen does not exist.

The violence inherent in the act of photographing a person committing a murder is different from the violence inherent in the act of actually killing a person. The violence inherent in the act of looking at a photograph of a person committing a murder is different from the violence inherent in the act of photographing a person committing a murder. Photographs of acts of violence are different from—and represent a different degree of violence than—photographs of acts of violence that have specifically been committed for the purpose of the production of images. It is thus problematic to use the term violence indiscriminately when discussing photographic representation (and, indeed, in its stead such terms as exploitation, subjugation, or violation appear in the photographic discourse). But even photographers acknowledge the inherent violence of their work. Don McCullin, for example, self-critically acknowledges this when saying that his work on wars and violent conflicts is “in many respects ... almost a crime.” (The focus, I think, should be on “almost,” not on “crime.”) It is violence exerted on the subjects depicted (see below); it is violence exerted on viewers who are exposed to scenes they would rather not see and to

which they have to respond, but whatever they do, they cannot directly influence the conditions depicted (see above); and it is violence exerted on the photographer himself or herself. McCullin, in the video referenced above, is not the only photographer who suspects he has been damaged by the conditions in which he worked all his life.

The photographic act is an act of choice and discrimination, assigning importance to something or someone at the expense of something or someone else, which or who remains unphotographed. As such, the photographic act “cannot but be violating.” The photographic act is said to violate not only those who are not depicted, by discriminating against them, but also those who are. It is alleged to exploit the subjects depicted, to misrepresent them, and to fix them in the subject position of “victim” without their own agency and in need of help from others; to create—rather than portray—victims; to revictimize and retraumatize people; to turn individuals into specimens representing, for example, preconceived “racial types”; to expose people to the gaze of others who are said to be “stronger than the one who is watched”; to contribute to “the asymmetrical ethical viewing position” characterizing the viewer-subject interface; and, ultimately, to reproduce power relations including gender relations. Photography is an intricate, sensitive and ethically problematic balancing act, and

different interests, not all of which are compatible, have to be considered carefully. Surely it matters whether the photographer exploits “suffering for pleasure or money” or depicts it to raise political consciousness; the photographs may be the same, but the underlying politics and ethics are different, just as is the photographer-subject relationship. Surely it matters also whether or not a subject agrees with her or his picture being taken and whether or not a subject knows what this means in a time of social media, online dissemination in real time, and numerous forms of manipulation, appropriation, and alteration. Surely, too, the relationship between a photographer and his or her subject, especially in wars and violent conflicts, is not always a mutual one but a one-directional one—one person taking a photograph of another person without offering much in return except vague promises to raise political awareness—and as such includes, reflects, and reproduces unequal power relations, equaling those prevailing in the social world, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau has observed with regard to documentary photography:

We must ask, in other words, whether the documentary act does not involve a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then represents. Both the social world and its

photographic representation involve acts of subjugation. Martha Rosler adds, "Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulativeness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay, or combinations of these and saved us the trouble." Mieke Bal, discussing the relationship between photographic representation (especially representation of people in pain) and viewers, refers to the act of looking at photographic representations of human suffering as a "secondary exploitation" owing to "theft of [the subjects'] subjectivity," the first exploitation committed by a photographer, the second by a viewer. Thus, there would appear to be a chain of acts of violence (or subjugation or exploitation), from the social world through the photographic act to the act of looking. The act of photographic violence exerted on the subject depicted cannot be separated from the violence of looking at the resulting photograph; the violence of photographic representation is inseparable from the violence of witnessing through photographic representation. The critique of photographic representation is especially pronounced when applied to perfectly composed images, often referred to as aestheticization. Beauty—undermining authenticity—is said to be inappropriate and ethically problematic with regard to representations of human suffering. Furthermore, beautiful photographs are alleged to direct attention away from the conditions

depicted in a given image toward the technical brilliance and sophistication of the photographer, thus effectively depoliticizing the conditions depicted. A photograph's main subject, then, appears to be the photographer; the conditions and subjects depicted escape attention. Bal specifies:

Beauty distracts, and worse, it gives pleasure—a pleasure that is parasitical on the pain of others. Representation is here perceived as turning violence—events, victims, consequences—into something that can be perceived as “art,” which is different than documentation, journalism, or critical writing. “Beautifully” representing suffering is not in itself an act of political art, but on the contrary, it threatens to neutralize such acts of violence.

The cautious use of the verb “threaten” implies that beauty does not necessarily neutralize acts of violence, and Bal acknowledges that representation “does not ... necessarily stylize violence away.” It “can also place [horror] in the foreground in novel ways that do justice to the political content.” If beauty is capable of either neutralizing violence or doing “justice to the political content,” then the aestheticization critique loses much of its power and has to be transformed into analysis of the conditions in which beauty neutralizes violence as opposed to those in which it does not.

Given that representation necessarily transforms and aestheticizes, criticism of visual representation in terms of aestheticization appears slightly pointless: the option not to aestheticize does not exist, and “uglifying,” suggested by Susan Sontag as a counter-approach to “[b]eautifying,” also aestheticizes. But also apart from terminology, the critique is not entirely convincing. Beauty, as David Levi Strauss suggests, can be “a call to action,” and many photographers—including Simon Norfolk in his work in Afghanistan in the footsteps of John Burke—explicitly capitalize on beauty and its supposed capability of tricking viewers into engagement, not only with aesthetics but also with politics. Beauty, thus, is not an end in itself but a means to an end—engaging vision. Mark Reinhardt specifies with regard to circumstances in which “photographers approach real human beings in their moment of affliction”:

If such a circumstance becomes the occasion to produce an image offering pleasure, and only pleasure, through an exclusive focus on the work’s formal or internal properties—so that not only the causes of and responsibility for suffering but also its meaning and implications are wholly obscured while being used as resources for gratification—then the aestheticizing work of photography would obviously be an especially unproductive, indeed pernicious, response to the world’s calamities and injustices.

Thus, in order for the aestheticization critique to be convincing, an image has to offer pleasure (and nothing else); the focus on the work's formal or internal properties has to be exclusive; the causes of and responsibility for suffering and its meaning and implications have to be wholly obscured; and the work has to be used as a resource for gratification. But "[w]hat photographs are like that?" Indeed, it hardly seems possible for a photograph to be indisputably "like that," given that every photograph carries with it numerous sites of connotation and speaks to different viewers differently. But even if we agree that the photographic act necessarily includes (an element of) violence, how could this be otherwise in a world characterized by physical and structural violence in abundance? It is for this reason that some authors, while acknowledging that photography is violent, insist that this violence is not only inevitable but necessary.

John Roberts explains why human suffering has to be represented all the same, despite the above critique. If we agree with him that "violation is always the precursor to the production of knowledge," then we may also agree that "it is the truth of violation that has to be honored, even when this violation produces images that subvert or weaken the dignity or autonomy of the other as other". Or, elsewhere: "[A]t some point in the interest of truth the preservation of the integrity of the 'victim' has

itself to be violated". Thus, both the photographic act and the act of witnessing through photographs may be violent, but both acts of violence are necessary in the interest of truth. But what kind of truth? The violations inherent in the photographic act seem acceptable on condition that the photographer, first, adheres to the notion of non figural, documentary photography in search of a conflict's "truth," "(some truth, that is)", and second, generates "a respect for the moment of the inhuman in the representation of truth, that is, an identification of truth with the making visible of the truth of the 'victim'". The truth of the victim is what matters, and it is the photographer's task to make this truth visible even if the visualization violates the victim's dignity. Roberts calls this form of visualization "representational intolerance," which "becomes the affirmation of the inhuman in representation in defiance of a culture where the representations of direct violence are constantly being dissolved into humanist empathy and human tragedy" and equally constantly being dissociated from underlying systemic forms of violence. The violations inherent in the photographic act seem acceptable furthermore on condition that the "photographer 'looks at' in order to look beyond, look elsewhere, look awry, so that the beholder in 'looking away,' after looking at, also looks awry, as the active producer of secondary ostension". Representational intolerance is, however, in itself intolerable as a general rule for

photographic representations of violence. Revealing what Roberts calls “the ‘thing itself’”—be it war, be it genocide—is not always recommended. He asks:

For example, how is revealing the “thing itself” of the interethnic violence in Rwanda in the 1990s respectful, helpful, or protective of those who were butchered? For it is hard to think of the benefits of “looking at” as the dead children’s bodies lie on top of one another, as children’s severed arms pile up on piles of other children’s arms. This is why many photographers who had access to the Rwanda war zones and the aftermath of the violence took the other route and excluded images of direct violence altogether.

Revealing the “thing itself” is neither respectful nor helpful nor protective of those depicted. Nor is it protective of the beholder: “in order to recover our (critical) composure and equilibrium” and “to try to protect the human being we are looking at”, we have, in this instance, to look away—only, crucially, to return to the image later “as a critical assimilation of the perceived suffering”. Without such a return to the image, we would “concede ground to the perpetrators of state violence and the systematic violence of the capitalist system” in a world dominated by images, in which what cannot be seen can easily be, and is routinely, denied.

Recent interest in questions pertaining to invisibility acknowledges the invisibility of many forms of violence. Invisibility requires artistic strategies with which to visualize things that are not supposed to be seen or that cannot be seen due to technological, geographical, and/or political conditions. Indeed, many trends in current military and security policies are neither supposed to be seen nor easily accessible due to geographical remoteness. Citizens' "right to look" faces numerous regulations, prohibitions, and attempts either to make things invisible or to make them too visible, that is, to multiply them in such a manner that they escape attention because they seem obvious. However, since Leonardo da Vinci, authors have also emphasized the merits of the invisible. Mitchell, for example, notes that the invisible affects the imagination more strongly than the visible. Artist João Louro, in his work shown at the Venice Art Biennale in 2015, focuses on the invisible—on "what's behind, what's hidden, covered, veiled from the mirror"—with the aim of countering manipulation by the image. Politically, the invisible has also gained in importance. Mirzoeff shows that the modern state has replaced permanent visibility (Bentham's panopticon) with permanent invisibility (the camp and its inhabitants) as an organizing principle underlying social control. Disappearance often includes invisibility (although photographs remain, testifying to existence). Invisibility is one organizing principle

among others: simultaneously the state develops and uses remote-controlled aerial photographic devices—satellites and drones—with which to expand domestic systems of surveillance, to establish permanent external control, and to monitor and kill people (accompanied by a fine-meshed net of CCTV cameras in metropolitan areas). There can be no doubt that these are important political developments, shaping both the wars to come and future domestic conditions, but why are they important in connection with politics and art? After all, the images drones and CCTV cameras produce hardly qualify as art.

Trends in current security policies, including military technologies relying on multiple forms of obscurity, remoteness, inaccessibility, and invisibility, can be understood neither from a conventional political science point of view nor by focusing entirely on technological developments. Current wars are to a large extent invisible; they cannot be visually documented by means of traditional photojournalistic approaches, either. Rather, in order for them to be visualized, sophisticated visual approaches are required, political analysis of which helps us understand the artistic projects and their underlying politics but also the politics these projects reference and critically engage with. If they want to visualize that which cannot be seen, artists such as Norfolk, James Bridle, and Trevor Paglen have to visualize their subject matter in a way that

affects viewers and tricks them into engagement. Otherwise their work (being as much about politics as it is about aesthetics) would be utterly pointless. These artists do not follow the simple belief in the power of the visible to trigger political responses among viewers, but acknowledge that “[f]aced with something obscure ... it is radically insufficient merely to shine the light of publicity.” It is therefore not sufficient for artists to make technological developments and infrastructures pertaining to warfare visible (just as it is insufficient for political analysis to focus on technological developments). What is required is a certain type of visibility linked to and derived from the invisibility of the represented. Sticking to some degree of obscurity and invisibility while representing the obscure and invisible is hoped to result in viewers’ engagement—engagement with that which even after it has been rendered visible still retains some degree of obscurity and incomprehensibility, requiring further investigation on the part of viewers; in other words, engagement with the artists’ politics and not only with their aesthetics.

Alternatively, artists such as Tomas van Houtryve employ drones—the same technology, lethal use of which in such seemingly faraway places as Pakistan, Yemen, or Somalia they aim to criticize—and bring them home, thus bridging the gap between “them” and “us” and indicating that in slightly different

conditions, “we” could be “them” and “they” could be “us.” (It is just a matter of time, anyway, “as it is in the nature of such a weapon to proliferate.”) As part of his visual approach to drone warfare, van Houtryve “bought a small drone, fitted it with a camera, and flew it in the US over the sorts of gatherings that have become habitual targets for airstrikes abroad—weddings, funerals, groups of people praying or exercising.” Aerial shots of distinctly civilian gatherings in the United States make viewers, so it is supposedly hoped, contemplate not only the violence of drone attacks but also the violence of drones as institutions of social control, domination, intimidation, and power projection, and as such, as ingredients of a politics of fear exerted on, and dehumanizing, faraway others. That a part of the horror drones exert on people stems from the sound of the propeller necessarily escapes photographic representation, however. Van Houtryve’s photographs from the series *Blue Sky Days*, reminiscent of photographic experimentation with forms, shapes, and shadows in interwar photography, appear indeed irritatingly tranquil and aesthetically appealing. Grégoire Chamayou writes that according to Walter Benjamin, “technology, today used for death-dealing purposes, may eventually recover its emancipating potential and readopt the playful and aesthetic aspirations that secretly inspire it,” and that is one way of addressing van Houtryve’s art politically.

That the photographs are tranquil and aesthetically appealing makes the viewing experience (at least my viewing experience) profoundly unsettling when compared with the devastation that drones are capable of wreaking—and regularly do wreak—on people. The tension between the tranquility of the photographs and the violence of the drone attacks that these photographs reference offers another access to van Houtryve's work because, as Strauss explains, for an image to "be compelling, there must be tension in the work; if everything has been decided beforehand, there will be no tension and no compulsion to the work." Tension is the condition of possibility for viewers to become involved in the work in a position other than as mere recipients of an artist's message, thus enabling "a more complex response." Furthermore, if art is political if it "extends the thread of recognition and understanding beyond what previously was seen and known," then we have to add that art is also political if this extension does not produce knowledge conventionally understood and instead confuses, irritates, and unsettles the recipient. It seems to be a part of the visual strategies applied by many visual artists to make the viewers' subject positions more complicated. Rather than offering simple answers to complicated questions, the visual arts, as has been noted in the context of identity and identification, indeed "complexify the perceptual experience of the spectator."

Artivism is a term used by the visual artist JR to describe his double subject position as an artist and a political activist acting on behalf of and together with the subjects depicted in his work. There is a long tradition in photojournalistic work of combining political engagement as citizens and objectivity as photojournalists, but JR's approach differs from that tradition. In order to assess his work adequately, it is insufficient to look only at the final pictures, large-scale photographs of women and women's faces placed in urban landscapes. This is what photographic criticism, always in search of "icons," does, a focus strengthened by the elevation of selected photographers to the status of celebrities (while the majority of photographers remain rather anonymous). To assess his work, it is insufficient to analyze audience response, either. A large portion of the recent photographic discourse has been devoted to the ethics of spectatorship, and while this is an important question, it is arguably not the most important one in connection with JR's and related work.

The most important element in JR's work is the extent to which his subjects are involved in the process in the course of which photographs come into being. Participation in this context does not only mean that subjects agree to their pictures being taken, but rather that they become co-artists who, together with the "main" artist, produce works of art that they would not

have produced without the artist's initiative. Ideally, the artist takes exactly the pictures that the subjects depicted would have taken had they themselves taken the pictures. The subjects depicted become agents of their own image, and the photographer becomes a vehicle by means of which the subjects exert agency. Why is this important? First, being an agent of their own image is important because, based on a belief in the power of the visible, it gives the subjects the chance to present their points of view; to break with visual stigmatization and routinized patterns of representation; to transform representation into self-representation; and to confront viewers with unexpected images, thus potentially altering the ways the subjects depicted are seen by others. Representation by others may not only exploit the subjects depicted but also patronize them, as indicated above when referring to the responsibility of the photographic witness, emphasized in the photographic discourse, "to best represent the interests of [the] subjects." In addition, JR does not, with the authoritative voice of the artist, explain his photographs, but relies on discursive and potentially open-ended meaning making resulting from the ongoing dialogue between the spectator and the subjects depicted.

Second, being an agent of their own image is important because it challenges some of the criticisms regularly articulated in connection with photographic representations of human

beings (see above), especially criticisms of exploitation and subjugation, indicating that things are slightly more complicated. The women represented by JR, or better, the women who represent themselves with the help of JR, do not seem to feel exploited, exposed as they are to the gaze of others. Some of the women acknowledge that they are suffering from unfavorable living conditions, but as one woman living in a neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, puts it: "I am very happy that this project shows how the women here are suffering and how they carry on their daily lives despite their problems. I think that this project will help the women of Kibera." Of course one should not jump to conclusions here; the inclusion in the book of voices critical of JR's project would not seem to be very likely. Furthermore, that individual voices support this project, hoping that visibility will somehow improve their living conditions, is sociologically quite irrelevant as long as it disregards the overall political and economic configurations within which the project unfolds. Still, many critics focusing on exploitation and subjugation seem to underestimate the importance of such projects to local people, and this importance stems from two factors: visibility (connected with hope; hope, however, can be frustrated) and participation.

As I have suggested elsewhere when discussing Vik Muniz's work in a popular community in Rio de Janeiro, which like JR's is

based on close cooperation between the artist and local people, being an agent of their own image is important, third, because—no matter what happens with the resulting images, no matter how audiences respond, and whether or not living conditions improve in fact—the experience of having participated in the production of works of art not as subjects of somebody else’s projects but as co-artists, as agents of their own image, is something that “nobody can take ... away from them because this experience is ingrained indelibly in their individual and social memory.” This is also an important ingredient of those participatory photography projects in which people who have formerly been represented by others take their own pictures by means of cameras given to them by the people who are in charge of the projects. This is so regardless of the limitations of such collaborative projects—and the occasional hyperbole linking such projects with emancipation, democratization, and empowerment—as noted by photographer Eric Gottesman:

I have often seen images from projects that undercut the good intentions of the projects’ initiators by falling back into the old stereotypes and power dynamics that the collaborative process intends to avoid. There are questions like: Who is editing this material? Where is it being shown? For what purpose? It bothers me when these projects use a pseudo-democratic rhetoric to describe the act of handing out

cameras, as though distributing cameras alone is “empowerment” or “giving voice to the voiceless.” When I see this kind of stuff, I become listless; the process is so much more complicated than that.

Collaborative photography projects cannot be reduced to what Gottesman calls “pseudo-democratic rhetoric”; indeed, his criticism targets processes of editing and publishing photographs, not the production process (which was emphasized above). As such it does not devalue the importance of collaborative projects to those who are involved in them as co-artists and therefore as political actors communicating, through art, with a wider community. It does not devalue the relevance of artistic work for citizens, either. Activism is not limited to artists. Politically engaged citizens can become activists too—as citizen photographers, for example, or as citizens engaged in counter surveillance that challenges authority.

Including politically engaged citizens who operate with images to visualize their politics in an article on politics and art may mean stretching the concept of “art” beyond recognition. However, concepts such as art are not fixed; they evolve by people “doing” them, either reaffirming or modifying them. Furthermore, such image-makers are political agents; their activities cannot be excluded from political analysis. And the open-access nature of their work is a contribution not only to political

transparency, but also to the visual-discursive construction of democracy. As always, the danger inherent in such practices is involuntary confirmation, by repetition, of the very practices that are the object of one's critical engagement. Furthermore, challenging state authorities as citizen photographers is not a contest among equals, but one characterized by profoundly unequal power positions from which actors operate. "The lack of proportionality underlying official responses to the taking of pictures shows the extent to which governments feel threatened by the uncontrollable production and dissemination of images" in the digital age, characterized by social networks by means of which individuals operate politically together with others, defending the right not only to look but also to show, to document, and to reveal.

8

Writing from a psychoanalytical perspective, Dominick LaCapra argues that "art, in its specific (often highly mediated, indirect, darkly playful, powerful but other than narrowly documentary or informational) forms of bearing witness or testifying to that [traumatic] past, might assist in partially working that past over and through, thereby making more available other possibilities in the present and future." Other authors, neither writing from a psychoanalytical perspective nor necessarily addressing traumatic memories, have also explored the relationship between memory and art and the political functions of artistic

engagements with memory and identity. Indeed, identity cannot be thought of without memory; it serves as glue with which to connect with one another otherwise disconnected points in time so as to form a seemingly coherent narrative. While the construction of such a narrative is influenced by all sorts of artistic experiences, it is arguable that photographs have a paramount role in it. Sontag notes that “people remember through photographs.” She also notes that this is a “problem” because “they remember only the photographs,” and James Elkins adds that “photographs of people I know and love are actually a poison to memory, because they remain strong while my memories weaken.” Photographs as two-dimensional representations, which are never identical with that which they claim to represent, tend to replace what Primo Levi called “the raw memory” and to grow “at its expense.” The idea of raw memory, fixed and unchangeable, is also problematic, as memory tends to evolve, adapted to the requirements of the present. Furthermore, for people who have nothing other than photographs to remember people they knew and loved by, photographs have an important memory- and identity-constructing purpose. And for people whose memories have been distorted in such violent social processes as colonialism, the reappropriation of individual and collective memories is crucial for the re-establishment of one’s peace of mind. Art assists marginalized people in reappropriating

memories that have been expropriated in violent social processes.

The title of this section is derived from Africa remix, a project of “artists subverting colonial imagery” by means of digital collages, who by so doing redefine history, memory, and identity individually and collectively. Africa remix is part of a larger trend to address African photography—and to address Africa photographically—in terms of African subjectivity, self-determination, and self-representation. In part, this photography engages with the colonial past and the post(neo-)colonial present; in part, it playfully and skillfully interrogates stereotypical colonial objectifications, thus offering “a counter-modernist and interrogative re-working of these photographic conventions”; in part it presents counter-visualizations insisting on the non-reducibility of the African subject to the colonial experience; in part it “searches through the remainders of the colonial and postcolonial past to question the emancipatory philosophy and utopianism of decolonization”; and in part it tries to escape from the shadow of distorted memories so as not to become entangled in the past.

This photography avoids visual fixations of the continent and its inhabitants as victims of political, economic, cultural, and social exploitation; as an environment plagued by war, disease, and violence; or as a “threat,” which

still seem to be the most prominent visual approaches to Africa in photography and mainstream media (with which Africa is in fact constructed in the above terms), just as it avoids the “exotic-beautification” found in such popular journals as National Geographic. This photography acknowledges violent and traumatic events in the past (and present), but its focus is slightly different from artistic engagements with trauma, and it is as much interested in participating in and triggering African dialogues about the past, present, and future as it is in participating in international, indeed global developments of the visual arts. Africa remix and other projects feature the work of African artists seeing and representing Africa, thus helping outsiders to see Africa through their, the artists’, eyes. Such self-representation has been noted above in connection with participatory photography projects as an important departure from traditional ways of representing marginalized groups of people. It is also important to note that these artists, by employing all sorts of digital technologies and combining them skillfully, successfully challenge widely held assumptions of African backwardness, technological and otherwise. While it would be tempting to engage with this photography in detail, I want to stop here. I want to address you not only as reader but also as viewer, to invite you to make your own visual investigation by visiting the website referenced above or <http://africandigitalart.com> to have your own

visual experience rather than listening to what I have to say about these images. If “we still must learn how to become spectators of images,” then this moment is as good as any to start this learning process.

9

In conclusion and according to Jorge Amado, “we have to recognize that no word spoken against violence and tyranny is entirely vain and useless: Somebody who hears it just might overcome fear and start to rebel.” We also have to recognize that no photograph taken against violence and tyranny is entirely vain and useless, because somebody who sees it just might overcome fear and rebel. As should be clear by now, due to, among other things, photography’s interpretive openness, intended and unintended connotations that images carry with them, different forms and degrees of visual socialization among viewers, and the dependence of the viewing experience on the context within which it takes place, the concept of “photography against violence and tyranny” is as vague and nebulous as is the concept of peace photography. This vagueness, however, also implies that any image could trigger Amado’s rebellion. Images are unpredictable and uncontrollable; no matter how hard authorities try to control them. Every image is thus potentially political, because every image may find itself “caught up in a process of domination and resistance.” And nowadays there are more images than ever before.

Hyperbole should be avoided, however. Causal connections alleged to exist between the regime of the image and the social world—for example, between images and digital culture on the one hand and emancipation, democratization, and empowerment on the other—are often wishful thinking and largely useless unless supported by evidence. The editor in chief of the *British Journal of Photography* recently wrote: “Now we live in the digital present, connecting online as global communities; communicating via vast, interlinked networks that bypass geographical, economic, and sociopolitical boundaries; using photographs where common languages don’t exist.” Who is this “we?” Is photography a “common language?” How can it be a common language when its interpretation is context and culture dependent? And if it is a common language, are we facing a non-hierarchical kind of communication among equals? Do networks bypass boundaries—and if so, what does that mean precisely? —or do they also create boundaries? The production and distribution of images may be more democratic than before, but it does not follow that each and every person worldwide would equally participate in image making and dissemination. Patterns of exclusion and inclusion can be observed with regard to both people participating (in different subject positions) in digital media and areas covered by digital media. Furthermore, the method of gazing, recommended by Christine Sylvester “to see things” excluded from

traditional political theory, clashes with digitization just as does the idea of “slow looking” suggested by Bal, because digital culture does not favor “viewers who scrutinize [photographs] with concentrated interest.” Thus, as has been argued with respect to the global reach of the Internet, there is reason for both “celebration and concern.” Regarding the overall regime of images and the visual arts in the twenty-first century, also, there is reason for both celebration and concern, but they should follow from analysis and not precede it.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Ed Andrade

Born in Quito Ecuador and since an early age, he showed his ability for drawing, painting and sculpting. His family moved to the United States in 1979, and he's been living in New York ever since. Andrade studied at the School of Visual Arts and got a BFA in 1991, he has shown his work on numerous occasions, and after 1995 dedicated his time in mastering woodcarving.

Alex Fernández

My artwork explores societal issues that are influenced by our current world and infused with a reflection of my divided Dominican/American heritage and MY love of 19th century European art. it uses allegory, symbolism & Impactful images, to compose works that critique world cultures, religion and social/political issues from the world we live in, with the intent to capture human emotion in response to these. Self-taught artist born in New York, but of Dominican heritage, he began developing his interest in art at an early age, using comic books as his major artistic influence. During his youth he spent some years in the Dominican Republic, where he began to be influenced by their artistic carnival traditions and the costumbrista style. As an adult he began to explore the history of art, various mediums and techniques, becoming

enthralled by the 19th century European art movement.

Gina Goico

My body of work is the result of a constant questioning of my identities, the quotidian and how I navigate the spaces where I exist in the Dominican Republic and the United States. With this process I have come to create a diverse body of work that ranges from collage to installations, ink drawings and performance. Besides the commonalities that reside in the conceptual process my work tends to share bright magentas, patterns, fabric and imagery that connects to the Caribbean. Currently my largest body of work is Imagined Identities, part of the #ATABEY project which explores Dominican women's desire, survival, aggressions and rebellions through participatory research, creating new artistic and academic narratives about the lived experiences of women in the Dominican Republic and its diasporas.

Alain Licari

Born in France, I've lived in Spain and now enjoy a life in New York City. A self-taught photographer, I am inspired by traditional black-and-white humanist photography, particularly the great masters like Sebastião Salgado and Raymond Depardon. Traveling around the globe, I create photo essays that cross art photography with photojournalism. I attach importance to producing an elegant photo —

une mise en scène—in a geographical, social and humanistic context, with an emphasis on the latter. By catching the eyes of another, I seek a moment and a connection—in the humblest way—with the human soul. Even more, I want these simple shots of everyday life to raise questions. After my time in the United States, topics related to politics, migration and the diversity of the American Continent—both the North and the South—have gained particular interest.

Yali Romagoza

A Cuban-born artist currently based in Queens, NY and La Habana, Cuba. She graduated with an MFA in Fashion from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2013-20015) and a BA in Art History from the University of Havana, (2001-2006). Her works have been included in the Gothenburg Biennial (2007), Havana Biennial (2009), Bétonsalon, Paris, (2009), Liverpool Biennial (2010). She has performed at Links Hall Theater, Chicago (2012), White Box, NY (2012), Teatro LATEA, NY (2018), Art in Odd Places, NY (2018), Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, NC (2018). She premiered her documentary/video-performance/fashion “Normal Is Good (I like America and America like me)” at Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago (2015). She has collaborated with Carmelita Tropicana and Ela Troyano in “Post-Plástica”, at El Museo del Barrio, New York (2012) and “Schwanze-Beast”, Vermont Performance Lab, Vermont

(2015), UCRArtsblock (2017), Queens Museum (2019). Romagoza has been granted numerous awards and residencies including Cátedra Arte de Conducta by Tania Bruguera, La Habana (2007), Bétonsalon Centred'art et de recherché, Paris, (2009), NYFA Immigrant Artist Mentoring Program (2017), NY.

Luis Stephenberg

Born in Puerto Rico. He graduated from the Puerto Rican Culture Institute School of Fine Arts, and earned a Master's degree in painting from the Instituto Allende, Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico. Since the beginning of his career in the arts, he showed an interest in an experimental and mixed media practice, which he has maintained throughout his professional development. Later in his career he integrated electronic images as visual objects. In the 1970s, with a focused interest in conceptual art, he became co-founder of the Movimiento Sintesisista Actualizado in San Juan, Puerto Rico; and the Manifestación Internacional Sintesisista for the Arts, at the Human Solidarity School on Suffolk Street, in New York City. He is also one of the organizers of The Bronx Hispanic Festival and The Latin American Art Biennial in Bronx, New York. Stephenberg's works represent the visual expression of particular historical moments. He uses painting, photography and installation as a form of communication between people and cultures, as well as a method for documenting and memorializing past events. His works

investigate the development of art as “idea” and engages the viewer in an examination of his or her life in relation to the events portrayed. Luis lives in New York, where he’s participated in several national and international shows. He also is a curator/alternative exhibit space developer focused on community oriented projects.

About the Curator

Cuban-born Bronxite Alexis Mendoza is an interdisciplinary artist, independent curator, and author. Mr. Mendoza exhibited his artworks in museums and galleries around the world in countries such as: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, England, France, Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and United State. Co-founder and co-creator of the Bronx Latin American Art Biennial, Founding member of BxArts Factory. Had curated exhibitions and art projects at The Bronx Museum of Art, Bronx NY; Museum of Piraguasu Paulista, São Pulo Brazil; Museum of Satu Mare, Romania; The Point, Bronx NY; Bronx Art Space, Bronx, NY; Boricua College Art Gallery, New York, NY; Union College, Schenectady NY; Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, NY; Loisaida Center Inc., NY; Longwood Gallery at Hostos Community College, Bronx NY; Hebrew Home at Riverdale, Gilbert Pavilion Gallery, Bronx NY; Edgar Allan Poe Park Visitors Center, Bronx NY; American Society, New York NY; Mexican Cultural Institute, NY; Andrew Freedman Home

Exhibition Space, Bronx Music Heritage Center, Bronx NY; Bronx, NY; Long Island University, Brookly Campus; Local Projects, Long Island City, NY. Alexis Mendoza is also the author of books, such as: "Latin America, The Culture and the New Men"; "Objective Reference of Painting: The work of Ismael Checo, 1986-2006"; Reflections: The Sensationalism of the Art from Cuba. All three published by Wasteland Press; and Rigo Peralta: Revelaciones de un Universo Místico, publish by Argos Publications, Dominican Republic. Alexis Mendoza Lives and Work in The Bronx, New York.

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_____. Roberts explains the "process of secondary ostension" as follows: "by pointing at one thing, we may in fact be making clear that we are pointing at something else, relating one thing metonymically, synecdochically, to another thing" (154–155).

