

31. Facing Art: New Ethnographic Approaches to Art Worlds

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Today, artworks, technology, corporate sponsors, and general audiences are blended into mega-events which have become significant features of national politics and regional development. Art exhibitions and concerts have become a form of minority politics. Artists' activities foster local identity processes. Art performances and installations play a mediating role in the environmentalist movement.

Anthropologists have investigated consumer culture, narrowed in on regions and cities, studied economic strategies, and written about museums and identity. But, by and large, they have avoided art. Art anthropologists, many of them still oriented towards non-Western art and artifacts, have also been reluctant to face these connections. Only recently have anthropologists begun to notice the power of art events, the authority of art institutions, and the connectedness of the different contexts of art production.

In this workshop, we will not only examine the reasons for anthropologists' uneasiness with contemporary art, but will first and foremost discuss new approaches to art by looking at it beyond the limits of art anthropology canons. We invite both colleagues who have embarked on the ethnography of art worlds as a primary task and scholars who have found it necessary to get into art as an unexpected aspect of their fields. We welcome papers about the potential of an anthropological gaze oscillating between the bigger picture and the details of artistic production. We encourage contributions on the particular challenges of art worlds for anthropologists.

Fieldwork and Artistic Practices: The Case for Collaborations

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Most research on contemporary art worlds (itself still a small field within the anthropology of art) has been an anthropology *of* artists, rather than an engagement *with* artists. In fact, research rarely honours the 'participant' side of the ethnographic method.

This paper explores how far an involvement in the material practices of art production can lead not only to a better understanding of art worlds, but also how artists' practices can enhance ethnographic sensibilities.

Based on a number of field projects in Argentina's contemporary art world, such as the shooting of a feature film with a film crew, collaborating in the artistic fieldwork of a visual artist, and working with urban potters appropriating indigenous cultures, the paper explores the possibilities of ethnographic participation in artistic activities.

In the conclusion, the implications of such collaborations for a more general theory of appropriation, learning and knowledge acquisition are evaluated.

Pictures on the Move: Avant-Garde Art, Contemporary Design, and the Scientific Aesthetic

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Pictures of zygote cells, magazine ads for laminate, and avant-garde art: what can these three types of depictions have in common? In the last five years, avant-garde artists have been reconsidering the changing definition of nature and life in the context of bioengineering and genetic research. This paper, based on a historical and ethnographic investigation, looks at the circulation of images between avant-garde art, high end advertising in architecture and design using biological images, and the conventions and aesthetics of scientific representation. It argues that anthropological investigation of artistic production can illuminate not only the internal logic of art but also the character and significance of the interconnectedness between cultural fields. Inspired by a series of unusual ads for laminate in the American architecture and design magazine *Metropolis*, the study charts the flows which bring scientific imaging techniques and visualization into the art world and then carry them on, appropriated and transformed by the avant-garde, to new terrains, including the media and advertisement. The study traces the movement of images focusing on the specific (and often implicit) aesthetic of scientific depiction, which avant-garde art appropriates and passes on, changing in the process how we imagine nature and life.

Face to Face with the Market: Canadian Inuit Art in the Twenty-First Century

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The market for Canadian Inuit sculptural and print art is overwhelmingly in Southern Canada and other countries. But most Inuit artists, among them the foremost contemporary artists in Canada, live in the Arctic and export their arts through cooperative, commercial and governmental channels. In the recent, unexpected "migration" of Inuit to the urban "South," many artists now work face to face with their galleries and patrons. This paper discusses the many kinds of "urban" Inuit art and artists, and the key influences on the style and content of their artistic output:

(1) Artists who grew up unschooled and practiced in the North and later came South to be closer to their markets or for personal reasons.

(2) Artists who grew up in the North, but attended art school and now live in the South.

(3) Long-term Inuit residents of the South who became illustrators first and then artists without formal training.

(4) Young artists with Inuit or mixed-Inuit parenthood who grew up in the South and attended art school, who may achieve their Inuit identity through their art.

It also recognizes that the field of anthropology of art must change along with its mobile and increasing metropolitan subject matter.

Claiming Modernity through Aesthetics: A comparative Look at Germany and Turkey

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This research paper employs art as a lens through which to interrogate conceptions of modernity and civil society in Germany and Turkey. Proposing that in both the German and the Turkish national context artistic representation has been an important site to assert respective claims to modernity, it investigates the historical and contemporary trajectory of official policies governing the arts and the political and cultural premises that have guided them. By adopting a comparative perspective that emphasizes continuities and exchange between the two locales of my research, the art scenes of Berlin and Istanbul, it also presents an attempt to critique the eurocentric narrative of the emergence of modern art. As one venue is established as Western and the other strives to postulate its belonging to Europe, this investigation tries to move beyond the portrayal of non-Western art scenes as a mere appropriation of Western models.

Contemporary Art in a Renaissance Setting: The Local Art System in Florence, Italy
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How does a glorious artistic heritage affect the practice of contemporary art? Does a widespread societal focus on art of the past hurt or help the art of the present? The contemporary art world in Florence, Italy--the home of the Renaissance--is analyzed as a local art market. The region's dilemma consists of exploiting its unique artistic history while trying to maintain a vibrant contemporary art scene. The behavior of local artists, dealers and collectors is described ethnographically, contextualized, and compared to a representative local art market in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. The two places are dramatically different: one is rich in art history and poor in contemporary relevance, the other lacks any medieval or meaningful artistic history but forms part of the dominant art system in the contemporary world. The problems of the contemporary Florentine art system are explained with reference to the city's history and current livelihood focused on mass tourism.

Making Art Outside the Gallery: Toward an Ethnography of an East London Community Arts Organisation

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Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, this paper explores the complex history of a British community art organisation, Free Form, and its somewhat awkward relationship with the established art world. Born in the counter-culture years of the late sixties and early seventies, Free Form developed out of a small group of London-based, visual artists' rejection of the elite gallery world of high art. The founders of the organisation were all trained at leading British art schools but had come to feel alienated from what they saw as a privileged and self-referential art world. Convinced of the liberatory value of art, these artists wanted to find a way of making art that would be relevant and accessible to those excluded from the established art world.

Using the Free Form case study, the paper argues for the value of an ethnographic approach to the study of art worlds. It also reflects on the complexities inherent in an anthropological project focussed on a contemporary 'western' art world, given an anthropology of art that developed around the study of indigenous art, and continues, even when, as in recent years, it turns its

attention to the art worlds of the North, to concern itself primarily with the place of indigenous art within those worlds - particularly their art markets.

Art, Politics and Atanarjuat: Whatever Do We Do with Beauty?

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The phenomenal international success of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* by Inuit director Zacharias Kunuk and Igloolik Isuma Productions compels us to consider the capacity of visual and narrative artistry to draw audiences into realities far removed from their everyday lives. Anthropological commentary, however, has so far avoided addressing the mesmerizing beauty and sensual pull of this work of art. Instead, it has subtly reinscribed anthropological authority by portraying the film's production, content, and reception only in terms of the politics of neo-colonialism. This paper will address the limits of this view before considering the aesthetics of *Atanarjuat* as alternative epistemology. The filmmakers' roots in video art and experimental film (albeit eluding these genres' restrictions) suggest new creative possibilities for bringing together expressiveness and documentation in ethnographic film and video.

Embodying the political?

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International art events have lately been *exhibiting* documentary work originating in India, while spaces of political activism and art merge through documentary filmmakers delving into video installation art. How does the anthropological investment in individual practices of conception, production, and dissemination of the documentary format in a locality, foster an understanding of how discourses of *the* authentic, *the* document, *the* political as well as conceptions of 'culture' are transferred into or produced within the art worlds? These interrogations of mechanisms between the artistic and the political are facing methodological, theoretical and representational challenges through the parallel activities of the filmmaker/ artist and the anthropologist. Thus, demanding and supporting encounters between knowledge productions must have repercussions in form.

Regarding the impetus of the film and art works I engage in similarly to my own, as a search for political alternatives, rather than aiming at analyses and critique of artistic practice I perceive one endeavour of art/film and anthropology as attempting the *poetics of history*. I would like to discuss working examples, which interweave various ethnographic and artistic materials gained and offered to me into a new *text*, with the ideal aim of dismantling hierarchies of knowledge through writing *with*.

