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What Lies Beneath

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PACITA ABAD, *The Village Where I Came From* (detail), 1991, acrylic, oil, painted cloth on stitched and padded canvas, 244 × 173 cm. Photo by Max McClure. Courtesy the Pacita Abad Estate.

So much of art is about surfaces and appearances—whether it’s what lies on a canvas or appears on a screen, or how an object looks or a performer moves. And yet with these visual cues, we are drawn deeper into other worlds and stories.

For our cover Feature on Pacita Abad, the late itinerant artist from the Philippines, assistant editor Nicole M. Nepomuceno argues that readings of Abad’s dynamic works often focus on their vibrant colors while overlooking the layers of material textures that reveal the many varied visual cultures that influenced the artist. Homing in on Abad’s incorporation of ribbon, yarn, beading, buttons, and cotton padding, such as in the issue’s cover artwork, *Masai Man* (1982), Nepomuceno writes: “Her paintings became accumulations of the artistic labor of peoples historically excluded from the global art world, or at best categorized as secondary producers of ‘craft’ compared to Euro-American ‘art.’ Each strata is informed by lasting textile practices which, though overlooked in formal institutions, thrive in homes, on bodies, and through memory.”

The practice of Hong Kong-based multimedia artist Lee Kai Chung, who is interviewed in our second Feature, likewise delves deep into what lies behind the facades of history. As managing editor Chloe Chu describes, Lee’s research-intensive artworks unravel official narratives of the Second Sino-Japanese War to reveal ideological inflections and omissions. Before they explore specific episodes from Lee’s process, Chu explains: “Far from being simply analytical, Lee’s works present their own fictions. Beneath their often-torpid rhythms and multiple, fragmented storylines, his videos capture moments such as the possible shoulder-grazes between passersby who may have unwittingly influenced one another’s fates, and the psychological tensions experienced by individuals during conflicts and in their aftermath.”

Similarly highlighting intangible forces, in *Inside Burger Collection*, artist Yehudit Sasportas explains her idea of “locked power” in a conversation with critic and curator Gesine Borchardt as they discuss the energy around a swamp in northwestern Germany that the artist was drawn to, before discovering a World War II bunker below the water. In *Up Close*, we spotlight three recent works: Mika Rottenberg’s and Mahyad Tousi’s first feature-length film, *Remote* (2022); Chang Yoong Chia’s batik installation *A Leaf through History: Family Tree* (2022); and Riya Chandiramani’s mixed-media-on-canvas *Thank You Ji* (2022).

Profiles turns the spotlight on Baghdad-born artist Ali Eyal, who “contemplates the lasting impact of war traumas and examines the places where violence might dwell, from urban and rural landscapes to the unconscious,” as contributor Amin Alsaden describes. The second *Profile* looks at the practice of Radhika Khimji, whose multimedia works exploring depictions and perceptions of the female body are featured in the inaugural Oman Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale.

In *Essays*, contributor Louis Ho puts forward a history of queer art in Singapore, and evaluates what the recent repeal of a colonial-era law that had criminalized intimacy between men might mean for local practitioners.

Elsewhere in the issue, for *Dispatch*, we hear from Ann Phatarawadee Phataranawik about Bangkok’s busy year-end calendar, with the launches of the Bangkok Art Biennale and the Ghost 2565 festival. In the *Point*, curator and writer Naz Cuguoğlu reflects on her participation in the Whole Life Academy in Dresden, weighing up the alternative-education initiative’s strengths and weaknesses. For *One on One*, Hong Kong artist Leung Chi Wo celebrates the work of the late French installation artist Christian Boltanski: “It allowed contradictions: both a celebration and mourning of memory and the past, of someone and everyone,” as Leung writes. In *Reviews*, we look at the biennales in Venice and Istanbul, and exhibitions from Auckland to Taipei, Hong Kong to New York.

Finally, for *Where I Work*, deputy editor HG Masters visited the working space of the young Hong Kong painter Henry Shum, whose enigmatic works seem to emerge from the artist’s unconscious—one, albeit, filled with imagery from art history and the internet alike. In his precocious experimentation with paint as a medium, Shum builds up and strips away layers in his canvases, leaving viewers to uncover their own associations with his uncanny, dream-like imagery. Encouraging viewers to have encounters with realms beyond the visible, for Shum, like many of the artists in this issue, is one of the reasons they pursue art-making and why we’re drawn to them.

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