

Editor-in-Chief's Note

In the current capitalist society, we live in a culture covered, publicized and produced by the mass media. Evolving from traditional channels such as print, radio, TV and film to new forms like the internet, virtual games and social media platforms today, media culture provides news and entertainment, shaping public opinion and popular trends, and creating a world of images where fiction and truth are indistinguishable. Very often, through sponsoring museums, media companies influence or even determine the curatorial direction of exhibitions in order to enhance their company image and business interest.

In terms of the development of art, ever since pop art adopted news events and the consumer culture as their raw materials, contemporary art has engaged in a complex dialogue with media culture. Playing different cultural roles, art production and the mass media are shaped by different factors, and have different effects on society. However, there is still a close relationship between the two. This issue explores how the topics and technology of media culture are appropriated and adapted by artists, how artists employ or intervene into mainstream media, or create alternative media, and what role the media play in the promotion and marketing of art.

The essays by Cheng Hui-wen and Chu Chi-jung examine how artists and art institutions strategically manipulate the media to render their works and exhibitions more topical, visible and influential. One example is the social media practices of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Through the convenient use of twitter and blogging, he is able to rapidly lobby like-minded global netizens to speak out for human rights and freedom of expression. On the other hand, the special exhibition “China: Through the Looking Glass” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York used the exotic audio-visual spectacles of fashion and cinema to bring in more visitors and revenue, as well as draw the attention of mainstream and social media.

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The three essays by Tai Peng-yi, Chen Chiao and Kathryn Brown respectively emphasize the aesthetic reflection of artworks and how they recall memories, revealing the production process and narrative potential of images that differ from the rapidly manufactured and forgotten media images. For instance, in the 1920s, American animator Winsor McCay created highly crafted and experimental animated films by hand like an amateur inventor and tinkerer. French artist Pierre Huyghe's new media works borrow from banal subjects such as news, cartoons and anime characters to recreate films of great emotion and tension. By turning old postcards depicting disasters into storyboard-like images with film direction notes, British artist Tacita Dean endows documentary photography with a fictional dimension and extends its life.

SooJin Lee's essay offers a glimpse into the interdependence between contemporary art and media culture. While examining how contemporary Korean art critiques and comments on the plastic surgery industry, it also points out that artworks are the products of pop culture. The six case studies on European, American, Chinese and Korean art in this issue amply demonstrate the importance of the media for the development of art, as well as clearly show the interaction, integration and differences between contemporary art and media culture.

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