

INTRODUCTION

The world of the journey furnished a symbolic text where each culture read its own intentions. Paul Carter's words, written on the cusp of the bicentenary of Australia's colonisation, prompted this first issue of *Index Journal*, "Identity." By focussing on settler understandings of place, Carter presented a new approach to understanding Australia's foundation myth, highlighting how shared physical space does not guarantee mutual understanding. Today, these words appear to echo in a period of intense and often unresolvable debate about the production, maintenance, or destruction of what separates us.

The issue's theme was developed through an extended dialogue with Greg Lehman, now Pro Vice-Chancellor of Aboriginal Leadership at the University of Tasmania. Together, we put our finger on "identity" as a watchword that has returned to public attention in recent years. Widespread and often acrimonious debates across the media landscape have been sharply focussed on *ad hominem* arguments in the political and scholarly spheres. Art history, we believe, is not immune to this. The discipline continues to occupy and be occupied by identity. Like the tracing of a body's shadow cast on a wall, art history's own foundation myth is sharply contrasted by the outlines of identity: between those who traditionally defend the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and those who place the artist in a privileged position vis-à-vis the artwork. The challenges posed by identity gave rise to this issue's polemic: "identity politics dissolves the identity of the artwork."

The proposition is treated in varying ways within the six contributions to this issue, each of which focuses on the complicated relationship between the artist, the artwork and the history of art. Alex Burchmore writes on Chinese-Australian artist Guan Wei's exploration of Aboriginal Australian-inspired motifs in his ceramic works, and their relationship to migrant experiences in contemporary Australia. Rex Butler theorises Wiradjuri artist Brook Andrew's *Vox: Beyond Tasmania* (2013) and its stakes for Indigenous identity and subjectivity. Ella Cattach and Elliot Yates theorise the problematic of "good representation" and explore it in the work of late American artist Mike Kelley and contemporary Australian artist Matthew Griffin. Katrina Kell's article on French 19th-century painter Jules Lefebvre's *Chloé* (1875)—on display at Young and Jackson Hotel, Melbourne—presents a new understanding of this iconic painting grounded in the identity and political activism of its proletarian model. Tai Mitsuji historicises another French artist who rose to prominence in the late 19th Century, Paul Sérusier, and whose painting *La lutte Bretonne* (1890-1891) complicates and dismantles the divergent cultural identities of the people of Brittany, as neither a peripheral nor typical subject of French history painting. Vivian Sheng writes about the *Projects* of South Korean-born photographer, Nikki S. Lee, whose performative photographic practice across North America proposes a distinctive way of imagining identity as pluralised yet graspable. The six papers in Issue 1 therefore span more than a century of artistic production across Australia, Asia, the Americas and Europe, presenting nuanced readings of identity, politics and representation.

Index Journal itself is the result of an ongoing experiment with the possibilities of open-access, peer-reviewed, digital art history publishing. In 2005, the *Electronic Melbourne Art Journal* (*emaj*) began as Australia's only online refereed journal of art history. Based in Melbourne, *emaj* was founded as a research platform by postgraduate art historians. It provided an international forum for the publication of original academic research in all areas and periods of art history. Over thirteen years, it published ten regular issues and two special editions (in 2014 and 2017). After the publication of issue ten in 2018, the Editors decided a new approach was needed that would continue to evolve digital art history publishing.

Re-focussing our efforts on publishing the most pressing art-historical research from around the world, *Index* provides a platform that utilises the evolving possibilities for publishing online, alongside the digital documentation of artworks and media objects from the art histories that occupy our collective attention.

As an open-access platform for scholarly work by art historians from all specialisations, *Index* treats the art of the past with the same urgency as the art of the present. For each issue, the Editors invite a guest editor to raise a polemic—in the form of a single proposition—that calls for pressing art-historical attention. The propositional format of *Index* intentionally departs from the academy's traditional call-for-papers. *Index* is committed to promoting difference in art's histories, as well as to supporting interactions between researchers working across and outside its often broad fields. The journal does not seek to develop any one art-historical position, discipline or methodology. Rather, it aims to provide a space where art history's urgencies can be contemplated and addressed.

The Editors wish to thank sub-Editors Isobel Lake, Mary McGillivray and Michelle Guo for their attentive copy-editing of this issue. *Index* has been generously supported by funding from the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, with special support from Anthony White and Charles Green. This funding allowed designers at Public Office to provide *Index* with a formally innovative and functional platform for publishing art history online, which will soon be providing innovative approaches for digital publishing. The full archive of *emaj* will be made accessible through *Index*, and all essays published will remain searchable through the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).