

LIQUID TIME
Editor's Introduction
by Verónica Tello

But are not all facts dreams as soon as we
 put them behind us?
 – Emily Dickinson

The purpose of restaging or reconstituting art and exhibition archives is not to calcify history but to document its fluidity. That is how the past endures—by being liquid time.

Restaging
 Reenactment
 Reperformance
 Restitution
 Loss
 Appropriation
 Theft
 Replica
 Forgery

This issue of INDEX JOURNAL unites historians, artists, and curators studying the methods and concepts of restaging history. Restaging is an open-ended concept related to loss, recovery, reenactment, reperformance, restitution, and appropriation. Some of these terms are ubiquitous in contemporary art discourse, such as “loss,” and “restitution” while others have lost traction, such as “appropriation.” Rather than centre any of these ideas, this issue assumes that the confusion between them and their complex interrelations is advantageous in opening up how we conceive of the practice of historiography as scholarly, literary, poetic, artistic, and curatorial acts. Together, they undo the calcification of concepts through art historical discourse. They show how art history is a chain of fragmented ideas, methods and cultural material layered with residues and potential. It is a shape shifter, malleable, and open to interpretation and disintegration. So, instead of assuming that concepts such as restaging, reenactment, reperformance, and so forth are solid and distinct in any meaningful way, or part of a hierarchy or teleology of art historical concepts, this issue enables them to blend and blur, fade and reappear, potentially in unrecognisable forms (to evade the baggage of the past or current trends, to gain a new layer of meaning, or to start anew).

The abstraction, or at the very least free flow of otherwise specific terms in art historical discourse, gives way to the meta-concept propelling this issue: Liquid Time. The objective of this concept is to reject the dulling, dormancy and containment of memory, history, and voice. Liquid Time is invested in history’s fluidity, giving way to all kinds of temporal drizzles, drifts and storms. Liquid Time manifests in various, sensory, evocative, poetic, watery and fleshy forms throughout this issue.

In Juan José Santos’s essay on haptic curating and Camila Galaz’s text on kinship and intergenerational translation, both written vis-à-vis post-dictatorship Chile (1990–), Liquid Time emerges as a method to gain a tangible, felt, touchable connection with the past. Both Santos and Galaz draw on oral histories and archives from the Pinochet dictatorship era (1973–1990) to produce embodied and ephemeral encounters with not just history but how we narrate it. In Kate O’Connor’s essay, Liquid Time flows through

the inhuman, permeable forms of Papermoon's puppets, which leave behind faded narratives of human rights violations from Suharto's regime (1968–90). In Seng Yu Jin and Anita Orzes's respective essays focussed on two iconic shows *Too Much Reality* (1974, Malaysia) and the Havana Biennial (1984–89), Liquid Time manifests as a method to spatialise exhibition histories. Seng and Orzes utilise architectural designs, floor plans, exhibition designs, and archives that recount audiences' movements, to sense and narrate the often overlooked yet vital affective spatial force of exhibition histories. Conversely, Darren Jorgenson understands Liquid Time as a form of collective memory derived from archives and oral histories of First Nations elders and allies in order to draw out the stakes of the 1994 exhibition *Bush Women*. Anna Parlane's formal analysis of Michael Stevenson's work *The Fountain of Prosperity (Answers to Some Questions About Bananas)* (2006) conceptualises Liquid Time by studying the materiality, texture, and detail of practice-led research, showing how contemporary artists recreate historical objects to amplify the "promiscuity" of the past. Lastly, Shivanjani Lal's essay invokes the poetics of water and stones to chart the border-crossing force of colonisation, empire and critical memory work across Fiji, India, and Australia in a post-slavery, post-Girmit context. Ultimately, all of the writing in this issue seeks a multidirectional and porous relationship with the practice of history, creating a vocabulary for how to think and enact liquid historiography: last time, that time, same time, from the time, over time, again, time to be picked up.

– Verónica Tello, Sydney, Gadigal Nura, August, 2024

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