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Letter from the Editor

Kate Korroch

Visual studies is a method of looking. Yet, it is a method of looking that aims to supersede what we might frame as “visual,” interrogating hegemonic tropes vested in that which we “see.” Visual studies is a contentious discipline, still preoccupied with defining itself or, perhaps, intent on evading a reified definition. Despite that, dozens of enthusiastic thinkers, including *Refract’s* editorial board members, enroll in graduate programs annually in the United States, pointing to the value in such an elusive discipline.

Refract’s aim is not to define visual studies, but to allow it to be debated openly through engagement with our contributors and readers. We seek divergent and contradicting perspectives and methodologies and, instead of singularly aligning with one, we highlight the details, which embody a visual studies that promotes our mission. As a journal we do not proclaim one particular strategy, instead we promote visual studies as an accumulation of diverse methods related to what is “seen” propagated by sundry thinkers. Through this and subsequent issues, we seek to enact a visual studies practice of prodding the familiar, stepping outside of boundaries, and bringing peripheries closer to an ever-evasive center.

Refract’s founding members saw a need within visual studies as a discipline, within our own practices, and the scholarship with which we engage, to involve diverse histories and geographies that tend to be on the fringes of visual studies practices. The discipline emphasizes contemporary art and predominantly focuses on the United States and Europe, while other locations, cultures, and time periods are pushed to the periphery or completely unaddressed. For our inaugural issue, we received a number of submissions that undertake this quandary and over half of the contributions in the first issue begin to parse this dilemma. Our goal will

not be accomplished in one single issue but is one that will be achieved over time and will remain our guiding beacon through issues to come.

Our inaugural issue is the result of the work and support of many individuals. On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank University of California Santa Cruz's Arts Dean, Susan Solt, and the department of History of Art and Visual Culture chair, Stacy Kamehiro, for their critical engagement and financial support; our advisory board members, Carolyn Dean, Derek Conrad Murray, and Kyle Parry; UCSC's directors of graduate studies Maria Evangelatou (2014-2018) and Boreth Ly (2018-present); Ruby Lipsenthal, Vivian Bee Vadakan, and Meredith Dyer; Monica Weston, Katie Fortney, and the team at eScholarship; Chad Jewsbury for designing the logo; the "Refraction" external peer reviewers; and our colleagues and mentors who engage with visual studies and have encouraged this project from the start.