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## react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture

### Title

Introduction: the spirit in the shadow

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/89t4v6wr>

### Journal

react/review: a responsive journal for art & architecture, 2(0)

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### Publication Date

2022

### DOI

10.5070/R52056626

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## Introduction: the spirit in the shadow

Rachel Winter & Megan J. Sheard

In his now infamous painting from 1820-1823, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes depicts an ominous scene of a bedraggled, nude man with overgrown gray hair who opens his mouth to bite voraciously into a decapitated figure. This is the scene depicted in *Saturn Devouring His Son*, one of Goya's "black paintings"—an emotive series reflecting Goya's complex and tumultuous thoughts and emotions. The monstrous "man" in the painting is Saturn, a mythological character known as the god of dissolution and rejuvenation. As the story goes, Saturn was downtrodden, and ate his sons immediately after their birth lest they overthrow him. Saturn's body position suggests something between defeat and forward motion: half-crouching and half-genuflecting with head and shoulders upright, as if attending to someone peering in on his gluttonous moment. His eyes exude derangement, terror, and desperation. The unresolved tension of this moment evokes something beyond Saturn's narrative and the artist's personal affect. Not only the artist's rendition of a mythology, *Saturn* is also a rumination on civil strife incited by social and political turmoil in Spain.

Seen through the lens of yet another year shaped by the prolonged havoc of COVID-19, Goya's cannibalistic scene invites a reconsideration of the nexus between otherworldliness, shifting political power, and reactions to dire circumstances. These themes are the catalyst and framework for volume two of *react/review: a responsive journal for art and architecture*, "the spirit in the shadow." As co-editors, we intended this theme as an evocation of the spiritual, the monstrous, the otherworldly, and a

shared societal propensity towards the macabre in a moment filled with uncertainty. Our primary interest was in thinking about how these themes are imbricated with methods of political action or resistance, and the visual forms this takes across different time periods and geographic regions. The emphasis on political praxis drew us to attend to a range of subtle distinctions between manifestations of the supernatural: the “spirit” may be a generative principle of a work’s production, the effect of aesthetic practices on audiences, or the explicit or implicit ideological content of an artform. As our contributing authors illuminate, the spirit may also be present in affective embodiments, imagined futures, accidental veneration, and even revolts against religion itself. The entangled dimensions of the spiritual and the political are present in varying ways throughout the volume as the authors deploy analytics such as race, gender, and class to grapple with the forces of capitalism, and examine strategies of visibility and knowledge production as intersectional and evolving.

The trajectory of this volume’s theme emerges from inquiries into the paranormal and the supernatural across art history, which was the subject of the 2021 UCSB Art History Graduate Student Association Symposium “Haunting the Canon,” organized by Elizabeth Driscoll Smith and Sara Morris. The Symposium investigated the ways artists and art historians engage with the supernatural and “alternate strategies of world-making” (see Smith and Morris, this edition). Like much of our lives, the symposium was also shaped by the pandemic, forcing the event to take place on Zoom, a pivot which ultimately enriched conversations around the subject through the broad array of voices who participated from across the country. As Smith and Morris note in their reflections on the symposium, versions of “super-phenomena” may be considered not only in terms of aesthetic content, but also as a methodology for analysis, an important distinction that became a catalyst for the thought-provoking content featured in this volume. By building on the symposium’s intellectual framework, and focusing on the relationship between political power, resistance, and the spiritual, we aim to foreground the themes that emerged from the symposium as the guiding forces of this volume, and as an incitement to future discussion.

Yet in curating this volume, a new theme emerged: that of reproducibility, and its attendant notions of mimicry, copying, and dissemination, particularly as they intersect with capitalist structures shaping knowledge production.<sup>1</sup> Goya again emerged as a case study: our original intention had been to reproduce Goya’s *Saturn*

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<sup>1</sup> Likewise, we are indebted to the work of Saidiya V. Hartman, and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. See: Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2021); and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

on the journal's cover because of the ways it embodies the lines of thinking present in this volume. As a graduate student journal with a limited operating budget, this seemed feasible since Goya's painting is in the public domain. Additionally, *react/review* is an educational project where authors do not profit from their participation, making our usage seem likely to qualify as fair use. However, additional information abruptly reminded us that we exist within larger systems structured around competition, and that where one claim to ownership might end, another emerges, quickly prompting us to shift our plan. The problem of image reproduction speaks to a larger issue: "open" knowledge is often only nominally so, or only so under particular conditions, just as political systems that claim to be accessible are rarely so. And, despite the ways academics might endeavor to upset hegemonic or normative systems, we remain entangled with the very forces we fight against in a dialectical push and pull between resistance and survival by adherence. Our scholarship and critiques of these systems somehow feed the machine itself.

The volume's cover image is instead, and perhaps more appropriately, DJ Morrow's balloon recreation of Goya's *Saturn* (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Morrow's playful sculpture harnesses the balloon as something embodying the power of everyday people, transforming malleable, latex rubber into an unlikely medium for expressing an array of severe emotions—emotions which speak to both Goya's historical circumstances and our own. There is something innately playful and happy about balloons: they share a kinship with bubble writing, party poppers, and small, dubiously red hotdogs consumed at children's parties. Their bulbous quality makes anything sculpted from them into a kind of caricature: balloons are cute and funny. While the pose and dark background of Morrow's *Saturn* lend the figure an eerie stillness, to consider the medium is to imagine it swaying and squeaking, simultaneously delightful and disturbing in its "cutening" of visceral violence. Goya's gory fleshiness is replaced by a synthetic quality produced through the curvature of the rubber that forms Saturn's musculature as it contracts before his cannibalistic action. Saturn's son, likewise crafted with interlocking balloon shapes in an x-ray-like view of his skeletal structure, also features a set of bulbous buttocks, a feature that twists horror and humor together. The violence of the image is both obscured and re-emphasized by the removal of its fleshy corporeality, as the parodic quality of the medium throws the grotesque subject matter into sharp relief.

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Morrow's work, see his website at: <http://balloonsinbold.com>. The authors would also like to thank Niyaz Mahmud for bringing Morrow's work to our attention.

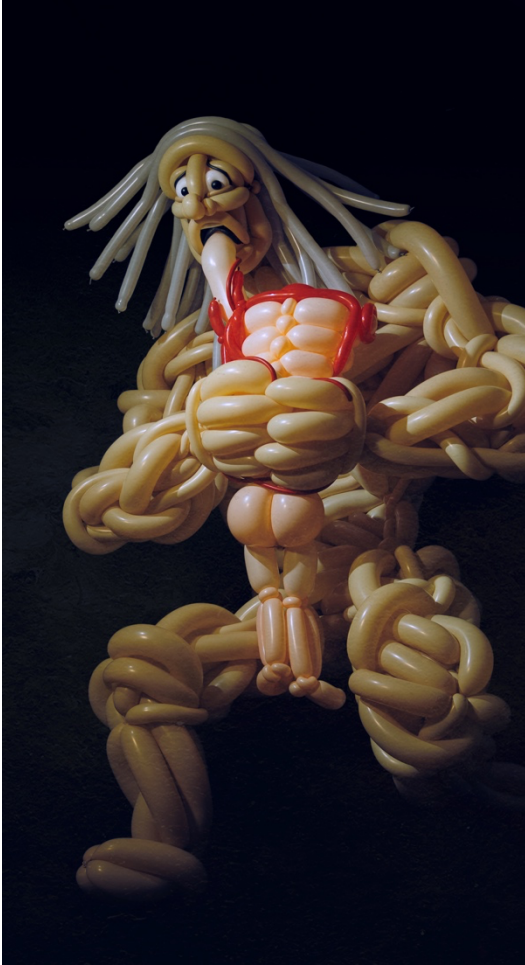


Figure 1 DJ Morrow, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, balloons, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

In the context of the volume's theme, DJ Morrow's synthetic *Saturn* might stand as a symbol of the thinly disguised systemic violence in which we labor and live: so much surface and brightness, delight and intrigue, yet monstrous in its playfulness as it devours its progeny. This last aspect was underscored by the pandemic when the designation of so many workers as "essential" seemed in practice to mean "expendable." It also reflects the conditions in which Morrow made this piece. Based in Texas, Morrow is a skilled maker who has been twisting balloons for over ten years, mostly for kids; more recently, he began to think about how balloons might be a serious artistic medium. As we write this amidst the ongoing pandemic, Morrow also made his iteration of Goya's *Saturn* at COVID-19's apex: soon after its completion, the

image itself went viral online.<sup>3</sup> Morrow's channeling of what he calls "a darker tone" through the cheerful medium of balloons raises the question of how artistic practice might convey emotive states and ways of being in unexpected ways.<sup>4</sup> Reproduction is also a means of resistance, not only to the hierarchies that otherwise devalue select artistic media, but also the systems controlling art's circulation.

Likewise, the authors who contribute to this volume each explore, respond to, and resist distinct structures intertwined with the political, the spiritual, and the otherworldly in its many forms. Volume two of *react/review* is comprised of seven texts divided into two parts. Part one consists of spotlight pieces, contributions which are more open-ended than a standard research article in order to allow for new inquiries, such as those related to methodological paradoxes, the state of the field, or other ruminations on the volume's theme. In "Reflections on Haunting the Canon: The Superphenomena in Art," Elizabeth Driscoll Smith and Sara Morris survey the overlooked place of the paranormal, supernatural, and otherworldly as something previously beyond the purview of art history. In their insightful discussion of the field, Smith and Morris point to the ways such terms have acted as metonyms for art history's pattern of denigrating women and BIPOC artists, and suggest possible avenues by which the paranormal can be a tool for responding to archival erasures. These questions are highly relevant as they intersect with religion, politics, and the contemporary art world.

Moving back to the early-twentieth century, Clemens Finkelstein's "Interiority, or the Evolutionary Objectivity of Vibrating Worlds" introduces his translation of Adolf Behne's "Biology and Cubism." Behne's previously untranslated text assesses the work of Jakob Johann von Uexküll, whom Finkelstein describes as a German biologist known for his thinking on the cybernetics of life, a subject related to Behne's interest in expressionism. Finkelstein's preface offers a brief biographical overview to this understudied art historian and architectural theorist, who was a part of the anarcho-syndicalist *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* in Berlin alongside Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius (amongst others), and illuminates the scholarly lineage that brings Behne to defend Uexküll's work. By critically re-evaluating Behne's work and intellectual lineage, Finkelstein thoughtfully delineates a case study of the ways power and knowledge are linked to modernist notions of scientific racism and primitivism in the work of a theorist for whom "true art" was related to that which is invisible to human beings, rather than an "unnatural" copying of appearances.

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<sup>3</sup> For the reddit thread that turned the image viral, see: [https://www.reddit.com/r/Art/comments/n194yf/saturn\\_devouring\\_his\\_son\\_me\\_balloons\\_2021/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Art/comments/n194yf/saturn_devouring_his_son_me_balloons_2021/).

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Winter, e-mail correspondence with DJ Morrow, December 2, 2021.

Part two, which is a curated selection of feature pieces, further considers ideas related to politics, spirituality, reproducibility, and otherworldliness. Feature articles are akin to standard research articles, and highlight the work of early-career scholars whose work engages with art historical subjects.

In “Sydney Cain’s Spiritual Refusals amidst the Afterlives of Slavery,” Angela Pastorelli-Sosa discusses the multimedia works of Sydney Cain, or sage stargate, to explore what Pastorelli-Sosa describes as “Black ancestral memory, transformation, and spirituality.” Pastorelli-Sosa unpacks the way Cain’s work makes ancestral presences “legible.” Pastorelli-Sosa elucidates both the formal capacities of Cain’s chosen medium, and its depiction of realities which are felt but not seen. The emergence of Black ancestral presences in visual imagery of the city allows for the remembering of a different past; by affirming Black presence in the Bay Area, alternative futurities which counter anti-Blackness can be imagined. This connection between the appearance of “otherworldly” ancestral spirits and alternative futures demonstrates how ideas and practices related to the unknown and otherworldly are imbricated with particular experiences of race and class. The otherworldly therefore emerges in connection with sociopolitical concerns around survival and resistance, lending it an experiential specificity which contradicts art history’s emphasis on rational epistemologies. Sylvia Faichney’s response ruminates on the themes explored by Pastorelli-Sosa in a meditation on the relationship between Afrofuturism and the built environment: in particular, the “imaginative structures” which make alternative forms of navigating through space—and time—possible.

Similarly attending to the potential of an artistic medium, Claudia Grego March’s “*Painting Viciously: Antonio Saura’s Monsters and The Francoist Dictatorship (1939-1975)*” explores the purposes of emulating visual motifs. On one hand, Saura’s copying of well-known figures or artworks was a continuation of Spanish historical and artistic legacies, but it also acted as a conduit for questioning Spanish national identity and authoritarian politics. By placing Saura in art historical dialogue with Jean Dubuffet, Asger Jorn, Enrico Baj, and Francisco de Goya, as well as other Cubist and Surrealist practices, Grego March presents Saura’s “dissident monsters” as a critical feature of his work. A close reading of Saura’s paintings reveals monstrosity not simply as a visual feature, but as a manifestation of the entanglement between the political and the aesthetic: a purposefully-distorted mimicry permits the monstrous to emerge as an aesthetic subterfuge which “ideologically destabilizes” the Francoist regime. Drawing on Grego March’s reading of Saura’s oeuvre as addressing specifically Spanish concerns, Nathan Segura’s response reflects on the socio-economic predicament of the

Mexican countryside as a context for interpreting the work of Mexican artist María Izquierdo, an artist likewise connected to avant-garde movements in Paris.

In "Saints and Zinesters: Fandom and Legacy in the Zine *St. Sucia*," Mia Uribe Kozlovsky takes the theme of reconfiguration into a performative domain by using the mimicry of cosplay as a gateway for considering the intersections of parody, spirituality, and zine culture. Beginning with artist Natasha L. Hernandez's act of cosplaying a figure depicted in a Judith Baca print, Uribe Kozlovsky elucidates a lineage of "aberrant femininities" and identities in queer feminist Chicana art in her study of *St. Sucia*, a zine founded by Hernandez and her collaborator Isabel Ann Castro. Produced to elicit stories from Latina femmes, the zine's playful subversion of La Virgen de Guadalupe into the "tough girl" Saint Sucia shows how power dynamics tied to reproduction might be subverted: in this case, this includes both the literal DIY reproduction of zine culture, and more abstractly, content dealing with the everyday bodily and emotional concerns of its contributors. As in Grego March's piece, what may appear as mockery turns out to be homage through a playful reconfiguration of cultural and religious traditions with which the zine's readership has a fraught identification. Uribe Kozlovsky's analysis shows how particular constellations of race, class, gender, and religion may result in the articulation of new systems of meaning. Leslie Huang responds with a defense of the fan against fandom's detractors, emphasizing the importance of people's relationships with objects, and reflecting on what taking fan communities seriously might add to our reading of art history.

Finally, Jillian Fischer's discussion of far-right black metal addresses aesthetics in a different register by introducing a sonic dimension of analysis. "Pagan Metal Gods: The Use of Mythology and White Supremacy in National Socialist Black Metal" offers three case studies that interrogate the ways far-right black metal bands incorporate paganism and mythology into their aesthetics, channeling spirituality into political ideology in visual, lyrical, and aural forms. Fischer explores the racial and spiritual dimensions of far-right political ideologies, and examines their use by national socialist black metal bands in their aesthetics and public statements. This musical inquiry is a counterpoint to the anti-racist praxis of presencing discussed by Pastorelli-Sosa, underscoring the mobilization of spirituality in service of competing political agendas. The "shadow" here is a troubling one indeed, invoking a comparison with its Jungian formulation as projected darkness. As the last feature article of the journal, Fischer leaves us with a word of caution: the "spirit" has no simple correspondence with a particular set of values, and may even function as an immaterial powerhouse for the denigration of lives. Taylor Van Doorne responds by engaging Jenny Hval's imagination of feminist metal, highlighting the centrality of an "extreme masculinity" in



the ethnonationalist imaginaries Fischer discusses, and querying how the figure of the witch might help us conceive of a “revolt” which does not simply reaffirm the structures it claims to detest.

Through the politics of reproduction in the modern and the contemporary eras, the spirit emerges in the shadow of political action in polysemous forms. It is otherworldly, ancestral, liberatory, antagonistic, evolutionary, monstrous, lyrical, sensory, comical, subversive, ideological, and many of these at once, ubiquitously present in the shadow of the political. This shadow is animated by race, class, gender, and religion: it appears as the collective consciousness of injustice, resistance forced into subterfuge, shared hatreds, and imaginative possibilities. Critically, despite their varying subject matter and methodologies, the contributions to this volume affirm the importance of collectivity, of the shared world in which such political interventions have their meaning, and of the human relatedness which underpins action. In a time of profound isolation for so many people, it is a timely reminder of our shared reality, and of the fact that such interventions do not solely rely on proximity or even tangibility. Intangible things also bind us, and emerge from our actions in the world. Such relatedness is the ground from which the contradictory and subversive ways of knowing and being discussed in this volume emerge, when we integrate the supernatural and immaterial into art historical discourse, and recognize the spirit in the shadow.