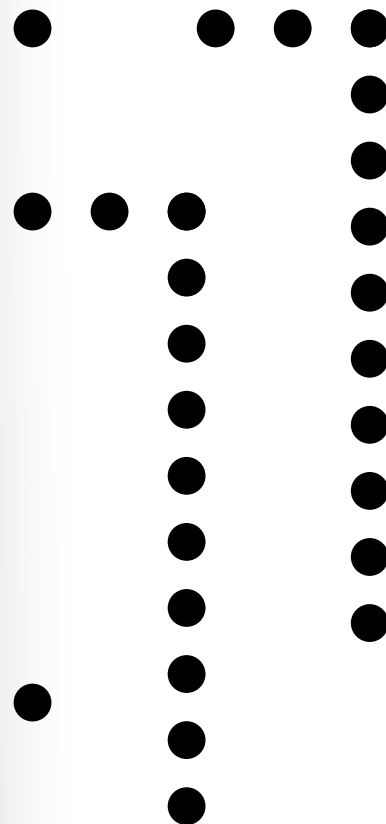


Editorial

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Editorial⁽¹⁾

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1 Translated by Phil Jones.

The 38th issue of *Notebook*, compiled in the first half of 2025, is, as has become customary, non-thematic. It brings together four scholarly articles and two reviews that address both contemporary practice and the recent history of artistic production. Despite the breadth of subject matter, we can trace connections between the individual texts in the form of questions that are pertinent not only to academic research but increasingly touch upon our everyday lives. In recent months, the (re)election of Donald Trump as U.S. president and the subsequent flurry of executive orders have not only sent shockwaves through global markets, but, along with political developments in some EU countries, have prompted intense debate over whether we are entering a new era of regionalism or nationalism. While in past decades the momentum of economic and ecological globalization may have suggested a world headed toward greater awareness of a shared planetary destiny and unity, the seams of that illusion are now unraveling. Sharp and often antagonistic boundaries between states, cultures and collective identities are returning to the fore.

The first text in this issue, by Darina Zavadilová, takes us back to a time when national or cultural idiosyncrasies were expected to be overcome by another idea of unity – the internationalism of the socialist bloc. Using the example of a reproduction from a catalog to an exhibition by Cuban artist Tony Évora, which took place at Prague's House of Cuban Culture in 1965, Zavadilová explores the historical, social and political dynamics along the Prague-Havana-Paris axis. This micro-narrative, though set during the Cold War, reveals the global interconnectedness as well as the internal contradictions of the so-called “peace camp.” Among other things, this article is one of the first to examine the postwar Czechoslovak art scene through the lens of decolonization and within the context of the Global South. Zavadilová shows that Évora's engagement with his Afro-Cuban identity and free artistic expression may have been influenced by encounters with various artistic traditions during his travels in Western Europe, as well as

by Czechoslovak folk art. His stay in Czechoslovakia likely enabled forms of expression that would have provoked ambivalent responses in mid-1960s Cuba, where addressing cultural and racial diversity was to some extent at odds with the official ideology of national unity based on class justice.

Following this opening text, in which history emerges in its fragmentariness, is an article by Daryna Skrynnyk-Myska that analyzes the most recent developments on the Ukrainian visual art scene. It focuses on how, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, approaches to the flag as both object and symbol have evolved in Ukrainian artistic projects. The article addresses the (re)formulation of national and collective identity in the context of war, where belonging or subscribing to a particular nationality becomes a politically and morally urgent act. As Skrynnyk-Myska shows, under such circumstances art demonstrates an extraordinary capacity to reflect diverse positions and perspectives. Identity thus appears as a conceptual and political construct that nonetheless affects us profoundly.

From broad geopolitical contexts, we turn to what may seem a less dramatic topic: artificial intelligence. AI is playing a role in the rise of neo-reactionary politics, as in the case of Trump, partly due to the influence of tech giants. It also features in new forms of warfare, as in AI-assisted targeting for airstrikes. However, Tomáš Samek's article redirects our attention to the question of authorship in AI-generated art. His argument begins with a critique of traditional humanist concepts of art. In many ways, he is thus looking back at the posthumanist concept of creative assemblages and what kind of actors, both human and more-than-human, are involved in the production of AI art. In contrast to a single autonomous human creator, which we tend to create through the anthropomorphization of AI actors, Samek searches for a network of interconnected, more-than-human ecological relations. He argues that the primary difference between a human (or animal) agent and a neural network lies in embodied experience, where the creation and perception of art is embedded.

The final study, by Marie Kordovská, examines the development of the Architecture Collection at the National Gallery in Prague, established in the latter half of the 1980s, and the ways it has been presented to the public over the thirty-five years of the collection's existence in exhibitions such as *Sbírka architektury se představuje* (Introducing the Architecture Collection, 1993), *Sen a skutečnost: 30 let sbírky architektury Národní galerie v Praze* (Dream and Reality: Thirty Years of the Architecture Collection of the National Gallery in Prague, 2016), and the permanent display *Architecture for All 1956–1989* that took place in 2022. The article draws in part on interviews with the collection's curators – Radomíra Sedláková (its founder), Jindřich Vybíral and Helena Huber-Doudová – and seeks to interpret the curatorial strategies that shaped the creation and presentation of the collection. Kordovská concludes that only in the permanent exhibition opened at Veletržní Palace in 2022 does the approach reflect international trends in presenting architecture. Rather than a chronological narrative, this model creates exhibitions that emphasize political and cultural contexts and points of intersection and place the subject matter in dialogue with contemporary social debates.

This emphasis on the political, social and cultural context of artistic production is also central to the extensive publication on post-war art by Marie Klimešová and Hana Rousová. The book, published in both Czech and English (*Tak blízko, tak daleko. České umění 1947–1960 v mezinárodních sociokulturních souvislostech / So Near, so Far 1947–1960: Czech Art in International Sociocultural Contexts*, Praha: Arbor vitae societas 2023), is reviewed in this edition of *Notebook* by Mathilde Arnoux. As the reviewer notes, the authors' approach is exceptional: rather than framing the period's artistic output through the binary of the USA and USSR, Klimešová and Rousová focus on interconnected European artistic networks, including those in Germany, France, Spain, Austria and Poland. The book blends well known figures and events with lesser-known

ones, combining deep analytical discussion with archival material. The history of the Czechoslovak art scene is placed in dialogue with Brazil and Mexico, while Finland, Yugoslavia, Japan and the UK also enter the picture. According to Arnoux, the authors' sensitivity to distinctive modes of artistic expression emerges from this heterogeneous assemblage and occupies a "gap between archive and historic narration, between text and image, between Cold-War forms of art discourse and today's."

The issue closes with a review by Vojtěch Márc of Jakub Stejskal's *Metakunsthistorie* (A Metahistory of Art). Based on a series of articles originally published between 2017 and 2019 in *Art Antiques*, the book takes a philosophical-aesthetic approach to rethinking entrenched art-historical concepts such as culture, style, form, image, medium, context and material. Márc praises Stejskal's skilful navigation "between popularization and expert interpretation." Particularly compelling is the idea that "artworks, through their 'formatting,' either affirm or subvert various forms of attention, i.e. ways in which we perceive and interpret the world." An artwork, Stejskal argues, can literally become a knot that "disrupts the smooth reproduction of cultural forms, thereby unsettling but also revitalizing its context by generating potentially new modes of symbolization and expression."

Let these words serve as a reminder that while artifacts can be interpreted through their various contexts (political, economic, technological, etc.), we cannot take these contexts for granted. They, too, are constructs, and art is not merely a passive reflection or intersection of their influence, but a meaning-making agent within their larger assemblage.