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Letter From the Editor

History is a funny thing. Past events stack onto each other, like pages in a book, deeply embedding truths and ingraining biases and beliefs. The past haunts in the present, looming over and measuring us; as artists, we often hear the mantra “it’s all been done before.” (Fears of being tropey or derivative run deep.) But looking to history can also provide context, clarity, and discovery, offering pathways forward within the particularities of our current moment.

Across this issue, we balance the present with the past, charting similarities, differences, missteps, and complications. Travis Diehl looks at how the subversive politics of the artist David Hammons, which once looked outward in response to the harsh economic climate in 1970s New York, have begun to feel more insular as his work commands higher prices. Catherine Wagley highlights collectors Elyse and Stanley Grinstein, discussing how the support they offered artists came via lived experience, space, time, and experimentation (and the occasional expense account). Looking back on this incredible family presents a way forward—a progressive model of what patronage for the arts could look like if accruing monetary value isn’t a collector’s primary goal.

This teetering between looking forward and acknowledging history continues in Jonathan Griffin’s article, which hones in on the group of artists who showed at the Bay Area Dilexi Gallery in the 1960s, and how their unique responses to a tumultuous era

might model a way of moving through our own contemporary political horror show. Later, we consider how Sarah Lucas’ brand of feminism stands up to today’s focus on intersectionality, and Donna Huanca pays homage to feminism’s history, while also attempting to bring less historically-recognized identities to the table. This thread continues through to the reviews as Hannah Hur, Terence Koh, and Sebastian Hernandez call on the past to validate their current endeavors, to mixed effect.

In the middle of this issue, we introduce a new portrait series near to my own lived experience: “Working Artist,” features three artists who also participate in non-art fields. Where history often limits the role of an artist to the fringes (or a back room somewhere, scribbling drawings while living off of Marlboros and Millers), these artists engage in the world around them in real ways, reimagining what a life as an artist can look like.

It is important to acknowledge historical precedents, using them as maps and guidebooks for moving forward. Yet, it is also vital to rip the map to shreds, inventing new structures that challenge the old ones. “Kill your heroes,” I wrote in my master’s thesis years back, in reference to releasing the psychic burden of our forbearers. This dance between generative respect and defiant resistance requires a delicate balance, the result of which is not always clear-cut. Still, it is in this soupy mix of learning from and pushing beyond that any kind of nuanced progression is possible.

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