

Letter From the Editor

At my public high school in the suburbs, our choir director had big ambitions; those of us in the school's madrigal choir would harmonize through Baroque songs in Latin, French, German, and Spanish. A common trope of choral music is the call and response—the basses and tenors trod down a verse, and the altos and sopranos lyrically reply. This pattern is common enough across other organized groups, such as religious congregations or military battalions—the priest recites the benediction and the congregation replies, the drillmaster chants and the drums pound back. The format is familiar and safe—but what if we go off script?

Across this issue, we explore what happens when rejoinders become more nuanced. Travis Diehl delves into the all too familiar relationship between artist and critic, arguing against a predatory one for something more symbiotic and collective. Catherine Wagley pores over the recently lauded Pattern & Decoration movement, using it as key for deciphering the troubled relationship between resurgent movements and the art historical canon. The path of unsung art movements from the dusty annals of history into present relevance is rarely linear. Features on Patrick Staff, Julie Mehretu, and Victoria Fu examine the many influences shaping each, echoing Travis Diehl's sentiment that artists omnivorously pull from the world around them, compiling, stacking, and complicating their starting points.

Our third volume of Exquisite L.A. continues this issue; the portrait-series-cum-chain-letter will continue over the

next year, tracing an unpredictable, snaking lineage of connected artists. Also, alongside this issue, we recently released an episode of *The Carla Podcast* remembering the infamous and towering John Baldessari, who himself skewed linear communication, creating sly prompts that were absent of any direct action or meaning. In the catalogue for LACMA's retrospective of the late artist, Russell Ferguson describes his use of language as pioneering. "In his hands [language] always seems intended less to impart meaning than to cultivate a much more complex web of misdirection and open-ended chains of connection," writes Ferguson. He goes on: "If everything is connected, however, then the field of connections waiting to be made is essentially infinite."¹

Baldessari, like a number of artists discussed in these pages, shattered the notion of a traditional call and response—i.e., the artist makes, the curator assembles, the viewer looks, the critic retorts. He instead cultivated a much more oblique and dynamic correspondence between these moving parts. If the call and response format is meant to spur communication and group involvement, what might it look like when the responses are non-linear, always-evolving, or even possibly, infinite?

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1. Russell Ferguson, "Unreliable Narrator," in *John Baldessari: Pure Beauty* (Munich: Prestel, 2009), p. 89.