

FOREWORD

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lumbung one entered the apparatus of documenta to fold it in on itself, and unsettled even the expectations of documenta fifteen being a ‘Global South’ exhibition. In this regard, one of the most common and unreflected statements about ruangrupa’s project was expressed through the question *where is the art?* And yet, among the evident and profusely palpable ecosystemic experiments – ruangrupa defining ecosystem or, in Bahasa Indonesia *ekosistem*, as the ‘collaborative network structures through which knowledge, resources, ideas, and programs are shared and linked’ – and the unfolding of the project as one foregrounding collectivity, sociality and decentralised organisation, it is also the quality, diversity and amount of artworks that stood out. We feel that the specificity of some of these works has rarely been addressed, the art press, both commercial and academic, focussing mostly on either the overarching concept of *lumbung* or the stigmatisation of ruangrupa. Even if some of the projects presented in Kassel were able to become independent from the event as a whole, this was only thanks to an acceptance of the loss of control built-in in *lumbung*. In this regard, the present issue is premised on the intention to examine some of the collectives included in *lumbung one* and their work with the attention we deem they deserve but have not been given yet. If only three of the nine contributions in this issue directly engage with projects in *lumbung one*, the escalation of the attacks and destruction of Gaza since October 2023 have magnified, retrospectively and in horrific ways, the West’s resistance to, if not its attempts to suppress subaltern and Global South worldviews that had played out in Kassel. Following *lumbung one*’s cascading logic, this issue then branches out, on the one hand, towards further engagements with Palestinian art and visual culture as a way to fend off ongoing erasure and, on the other, towards new understandings of geographies of art practices and histories.

This issue opens with an essay by scholar and filmmaker Furqat Palvan-Zade which intersects all these threads. Juxtaposing two projects – documenta fifteen and the Tashkent Festival for Asian, African and Latin American Films – Palvan-Zade examines a certain nostalgia for a past Central Asia/Eastern Europe/Africa cultural axis which reemerged in 2022 in Kassel. Looking at non-hegemonic transnational geographies, the circulation of ethnographic images, self-organised artists’ initiatives, and the aestheticisation of archival documents, Palvan-Zade examines internationalist genealogies and nostalgia within ruangrupa’s project in order to illuminate art and politics in our present moment.

A Eurasian axis of cultural and political cross-pollinations is further explored in curator and art historian Xin Wang's essay 'Dance as Socialist World-Building'. Discussing, among others, the song and performance ensemble *The East is Red* (1964) or the first Chinese socialist ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (1964), Wang analyses dance as a medium for the negotiation of nation-building narratives, ethnic diversity, and the role of Soviet models in fostering aesthetic ideals associated with Chinese socialist statecraft.

Artist Han Mengyun's practice and writings engage with transcultural histories of painting, philosophy, religion, with a particular focus on various forms of bookmaking and crafts across Eurasia. Her insert brings together stills from her projects *Night* (2021) and *Night Sutra* (2024), as well as a series of poems, in dialogue with her work based on the fabric made by women from the Chinese Dong minority. Pitch dark and pounded with egg white to gain its deep gloss, for Dong people, the fabric symbolises, dualistically, the womb's darkness and fertility, which in Han's work becomes a metaphor for women's suffering as well as reproductive and creative powers.

The issue moves onto Palestine with Melissa Gronlund's feature on artist Hazem Harb. Gronlund discusses how the destruction of his family home in Gaza during Israel's attacks has deeply affected his work, shifting from his collage and installation back to dark, expressive canvases of tortured bodies, reminiscent of his early work. This change reflects his personal turmoil and the broader historical tragedy of Gaza, emphasising the global neglect and the cyclical nature of Palestinian suffering.

Creative director, visual artist, and educator Kegham Djeghalian Jr reflects on what he calls the 'para-archaeology' of his grandfather Kegham Djeghalian's photographic archive. A survivor of the Armenian Genocide, Kegham established Photo Kegham, Gaza's first local photography studio in 1944. In this text and photo-essay, Djeghalian Jr explores various forms of disruptions: of his grandfather's trajectory, of Armenian and Palestinian histories, of the photographic archive itself, and of Gaza.

Presented at documenta fifteen as a ten-hour looped installation by the collective Subversive Film, and later as a feature documentary by Mohanad Yaqubi (one of the collective's members), the multi-faceted research and restoration project Tokyo Reels reconstructs the solidarity networks connecting Japan to Palestine between the 1960s and 1980s, through twenty 16mm films found in Tokyo in 2015. Meticulously locating the films' circulation within the politicised sphere of post-war Japan, Julian Ross analyses not just their content, but also the markings on the reels and the overlaying of subtitles and dubbing as a 'solidarity image' that exists alongside the 'militant image' – evidence of a longstanding and worldwide commitment to the Palestinian cause. Countering the powerlessness and hopelessness we feel today in front of an unceasing stream of images of violence, Ross defends the importance of gestures of solidarity that will be remembered in years to come.

Departing from the exhibition presented at documenta fifteen by the Palestinian collectives The Question of Funding and Eltiqaa, Hanan Toukan dissects the institutional contradictions that beset their reception in Germany, and reads the latter as ‘a site of epistemic violence against cultural workers from Palestine and their allies’ carried out in the name of the country’s post-Holocaust cultural politics. The denial of Palestinians’ ability to express their experiences of oppression and dispossession in their own terms – crystallised in the reaction of the German press to Eltiqaa’s founding member Mohammed Al Hawajri’s cycle of works *Guernica-Gaza* (2010–13) – feels even more untenable in the aftermath of the destruction of Eltiqaa gallery following an Israeli military airstrike in December 2023.

Korean artist Sung Hwan Kim’s *A Record of Drifting Across the Sea* (2017–) traces the journeys of undocumented Korean migrants to the US by way of Hawai’i at the turn of the last century, and ponders over their impact on other migrant and indigenous communities. Janine Armin’s close reading of the first two chapters of the work, as presented in the artist’s solo exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, reveals a complex web of entanglements between different bodies – be these bodies of work or the bodies of past and present characters who recursively appear in them.

Following the full path of the scirocco wind from Venice to its origins in the wadis of the Egyptian Sahara, Haseeb Ahmed’s film *Sand Reckoner* is a work of chorography – or cumulative portrait of a place – that reveals the ‘temporal palimpsests’ connecting the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Presented here as an artist insert that draws from and reflects on the film, Ahmed’s self-described ‘piece of wind-religious propaganda’ aims to redeem the past so as to create new horizons in the present.

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The colour black of this issue’s cover can be read as a sign of mourning for the countless lives lost in ongoing war and destruction. Black is the colour of the charcoal Hazem Harb has returned to in his paintings of recent months. It is also, however, an evocation of the darkness of the night which, as Han Mengyun reveals, can be a site of endless creative possibility and female empowerment. While the nights in Gaza continue to be lit up in horrific airstrikes, we can find perhaps some hope in the closing words of Etel Adnan’s book-length poem *The Arab Apocalypse*:

‘When the sun will run its ultimate road
Matter-Spirit will become the NIGHT
in the night in the night we shall find knowledge love and peace’¹

1 Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse*, Sausalito: The Post-Apollo Press, 1989 [1980], p.78.