
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Stephanie Cristello



OPERA AS FORM

In the course of assembling this issue, one reference has been particularly present: opera. To paraphrase Lina Lapelytė, one of the contributors to the Lithuanian Pavilion, featured in an interview by Natalie Hegert in *Notes on Venice*, “Opera is as related to the visual arts as any other kind of installation. It is literature; it is music, it is a *gesamtkunstwerk*, and none of the features are more important than the other.” This sentiment rings true for the Golden-Lion-winning project, entitled *Sun & Sea*, whose operatic critique of the issues facing climate change unfolded in perhaps one of the most complex, yet delicate, works in installation I have seen in recent years. The concept of ‘opera as form’ is further explored in a range of texts included within Issue 09, such as in Jill Danto’s writing on Anne Imhof’s *Sex* at the Art Institute of Chicago, or Caroline Picard’s meditation on the exhibition *Bel Canto* at SITE Santa Fe, which features eight distinct projects by contemporary artists responding to the operatic tradition through a series of individual works ranging from photography, sculpture, and film. As Picard notes in her piece, the origins of opera date back to the 1600s, through the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice from Greek mythology, whose account is as embedded

in the form as it is to the implications of art itself. —————

————— To position an operatic turn in contemporary art may be a stretch, given the fragmented state of our twenty-first-century landscape, but it is certainly an argument, in the truest sense of the term—a description of the scene at the beginning of an act, before the drama fully unfolds. —————

In comparison to opera, the time we spend in an exhibition of contemporary art is minimal. This issue seeks to adopt an operatic time, allowing the narratives, references, and ideas within the work of the contemporary artists discussed to slowly develop. While artists whose work touches upon the sonic or filmic is privileged—such as Hong-Kong-based Samson Young’s first museum solo exhibition in the United States at the Smart Museum of Art, a piece on the recently instituted Joseph J. McPhee Jr. Archive and Listening Room at Corbett vs. Dempsey, or Minh Nguyen’s feature on the rise of slow cinema—other pieces take this tempo to its limits, the texts existing as works almost in themselves within the context of cultural critique. Specifically, Mayne’s *On the Death of Camp*, that grafts the form of Susan Sontag’s seminal text to examine the phenomena of

the Met Gala, to Volume I of *The Sirens* by Ruslana Lichtzier and Shana Hoehn, an image-based essay that explores the visuality of women and madness across time and space. On the cover is a collaborative work by Danish artists Stine Deja and Marie Munk, whose practice was introduced to me by Artistic Director of the Kunsthall Aarhus Jacob Fabricius. Deja’s work, which looks at how intimacy is affected by our increasingly digital environment, is further explored through a Special Edition Insert. —————

————— The unconventional use of the journal format that THE SEEN proposes joins the approach of our Staff Writers, feeling into different ways we can write about and publish on art.

STEPHANIE CRISTELLO

Editor-in-Chief

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