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survey contained in the rest of *Reading the Contemporary*, including its rough spots.

Many of the illustrations in this anthology do not correlate with the essays. The cover of the book and also Enwezor's essay "Between Worlds" include images from British art star Yinka Shonibare's 1998 photo series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, which is not written about in the book. Remarkably, even the first three illustrations in the book, by Mary Evans, Kay Hassan, and William Kentridge, are also not the subjects of any essays. Interested readers will in some cases have to track down original versions of the reprinted texts in order to see the art to which the essays refer.

The book's thematic sections are not individually contextualized by prefatory remarks citing the broader intellectual histories for the selected essays, and the volume contains no concluding review. The editors included five essays of their own but neglected to include any lengthy editorial contextualization for their choices or for their exclusion of opposing viewpoints. These will be especially missed (or perhaps not noticed?) by those readers with little background in either older or more recent art from Africa, or with limited exposure to the academic debates about modern African art production and reception that have preoccupied scholars since at least the 1950s. Readers must look to the five-page editorial introduction for a briefly stated rationale regarding essay selection and themes. The editors' primary concern is recent art produced in relationship with post–World War II globalization and the making of a new African diaspora distinct from the African diaspora created in the New World through the Atlantic slave trade. It is a diverse diaspora composed of economic and political refugees to Europe and America, the so-called "blow-back" of the ravaged landscape of the postcolonial era. It is also a diaspora of students, political actors, intellectuals (including the editors), and artists as well as middle-class Africans seeking the relative safety, luxury, and possibilities for liberal intellectual debate not found on most of the African continent today. Art produced in this milieu can pose critical questions about the conditions of global modernity experienced more broadly, especially after the Cold War, by citizens in the West not necessarily self-identified as diasporan, hybrid, exilic, or even African. Nevertheless, and despite the editors' introductory statements to the contrary, there exists a large gap between art produced for exhibitions in Europe by African artists, or art produced by Africans living abroad, and the provincial art scenes in the different African countries.

Despite its lack of editorial oversight, I think this book is an important document of a particular moment when modernism and its relationship with Africa was argued in a provocative manner by a number of authors. Many of these essays have already had a major impact on studio practice and criticism in the art world. It is a dull and dated view indeed that considers the global formation of modernity and modernism, of the "universal subject," as always and ultimately only Western—and that everyone else is a mimic. The essays in this anthology demonstrate conclusively that this is not the case. There is a different but also central story that can be told by keeping the focus on Africa.

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Against the Grain

Holland Cotter

Susan Bee and Mira Schor, eds. ***M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism.*** With an introduction by Johanna Drucker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 496 pp., $79.95; $24.95 paper.

Mainstream art critics are a suspect lot. Most, whether they like it or not—and some like it just fine—are married to the mob: the network of dealers, curators, and collectors who manage the market and reap its substantial rewards. "If you've been an art critic as long as I have," said Dave Hickey in a *zingmagazine* interview, "it is very important to be what they call 'bankable.' Which means if you look at all the people you have written about, it is important that their prices go up. In other words, you're not going to spend all your time writing about some bumpkin who carves tree stumps in Seattle. It doesn't matter, the word's not out there, people are not talking about it. . . ."[1] This boils down to saying that any artist who fails to gain critical, i.e. market, approval is, by definition, unworthy of attention. Hickey seems to support this version of art world *Machtpolitik*, and he is by no means alone. So alternative sources of critical thought and opinion are necessary, and none are more valuable than those that give artists themselves a voice.

One such source was the journal titled *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, first published in New York in 1987. It appeared at a time when sales were hot and a small group of neo-Conceptualist "commodity-critique" stars were enjoying fabulous success. But it emerged from a less glamorous, highly diversified world of artists who had to work hard to get exhibited, who in many cases depended on day jobs or supportive partners to make a living, and who routinely sought advice, inspiration, and reassurance in each other's company.

Founded by Susan Bee and Mira Schor, both painters, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* served as sounding board and survival manual for artists and critics alike. Its articles and roundtable discussions incorporated both studio shoptalk and reflections on career-related matters such as parenting, aging, and career management. Much of the content

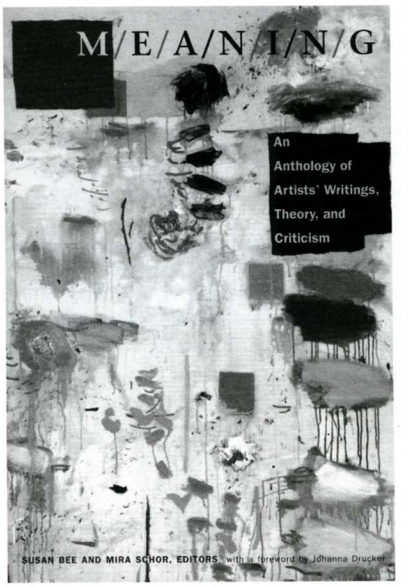
was overtly or obliquely political, no surprise given its editors' roots in feminist thinking and practice. In the early 1990s, when issues of race, gender, and class were infusing American art with a new content, the same issues came under intensive discussion in M/E/A/N/I/N/G. The journal was clearly not, however, in the business of shaping a specific program or, apart from a preference for accessible language, a house style. Rather, the idiosyncratic individual voice—wry, poetic, impassioned, pissed-off—prevailed. Theory was valued, but personal experience also counted for a lot.

Now highlights from the journal have been brought together in a chunky Duke University Press paperback titled M/E/A/N/I/N/G: *An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, edited by Bee and Schor, and with a lucid introduction by the artist and art historian Johanna Drucker, who was also a journal contributor. With dozens of shortish entries on a variety of topics, the book makes for solid, sometimes trenchant reading, with contents that have, on the whole, aged well and even have continuing pertinence.

This is particularly true of some of the longer pieces in the first section, "Feminism and Art," which opens with one of the book's most important contributions, the essay by Amelia Jones titled "'Post-Feminism'—A Remasculization of Culture?" In it, Jones traces the mainstreaming of 1970s feminism by both the popular press and the 1980s art world, a process that, in her view, was a not-so-subtle move to destabilize and diminish a movement of empowerment by wrapping it in what appeared to be an accepting embrace. Jones's analysis is subtle and to the point, and her final piece of cautionary advice—"We must be wary of this gesture of inclusion" (19)—is every bit as sound now, in matters concerning gender, sexuality, and race, as it was then.

In certain cases, that embrace has simply never been extended. Carolee Schneemann, ahead of her time in so many ways and adamantly resistant to market assimilation, was and remains underhonored in the art world itself and an object of harassment outside of it, as is suggested in her account, recorded in a 1988 interview with Aviva Rahmani, of censorship she has encountered over the years. In other essays and interviews, Laura Cottingham, Patricia Cronin, and Deborah Kass address the continuing mainstream unacceptability, inside and outside the art world, of lesbianism as a mode of difference. And Faith Wilding, a participant in the pioneering feminist art of the early 1970s in California, writes of the exclusion of that venturesome phase of the movement, when huge and risky political and conceptual leaps were made, from standard historical accounts and museum exhibition programs.

Occasionally M/E/A/N/I/N/G aimed its critical guns at a specific artist. In an essay in the book's second section, "The Politics of Meaning and Representation," for example,



Schor devastatingly sizes up the work of one of the 1980s critical darlings, David Salle, from a feminist perspective. Usually, though, the emphasis is on issues rather than personalities, as in Daryl Chin's coolly furious indictment of the racism, overt and occult, that pervades the arts in America. That subject is further explored in one of the several "Forums" that were, as Drucker notes in her introduction, among the journal's strongest features. They consisted of a group of short, first-person meditations by artists and critics on thematically based questions posed by the editors. The respondents tend to be a mix of generations, disciplines, and backgrounds, and for that reason the forums offer diverse, usefully conflicting perspectives on the matter at hand.

This experience-based approach yields especially interesting results in the forum titled "On Motherhood, Art, Apple Pie." The older contributors are more or less unanimous in feeling that in the 1950s and 1960s, for a female artist to have children was tantamount to deciding to abandon an art career or pursue it only sporadically. Motherhood also often entailed virtual ostracism by dealers, curators, critics, and even other artists. The younger contributors, by contrast, appear to have found parenthood less of a career liability, though they also observe that many of their artist peers have chosen to remain childless, which may or may not indicate old pressures persisting in internalized form.

A generational divide is also posited as a shaping factor in two separate forums on the broad topic of "working conditions." In the first, questions were submitted to a group of artists—among them Rudolf Baranick, Leon Golub, Ann McCoy, Howardena Pindell, and Richard Tuttle—whose careers were at that point already at least a couple of decades old. The second discussion was generated by a handful of younger artists such as Lisa Hoke, Julia Jacquette, Rebecca Quaytman, Christian Schumann, Amy Sillman, and Karen Yasinsky. One unmistakable difference between the two groups lay in what might be called the optimism quotient: several of the older artists had clearly had their idealism tested over the years by sobering political, social, and personal reality checks that the younger ones had not yet experienced. Was the difference in attitude a natural reflection of stages of maturity, or did it indicate that the career path had indeed grown smoother in important ways from one generation to the next? No conclusions are drawn, but the data delivered is provocative.

Finally, the journal published a number of in-depth scholarly pieces. Pamela Wye is represented by two essays, one on Florine Stettheimer, a figure still little examined in the mid-1980s, the other on Nancy Spero, who was just gaining belated recognition at the time. Spero herself contributed a mock exhibition review of an "extremely young, beautiful [male] California artist named Putz whose career was built entirely on testosterone and hot theoretical air" (350). Originally written in 1967 and submitted to *Artforum* (it was rejected), it succinctly skewers exactly the kind of rhetorical cant and

celebrity mongering that M/E/A/N/I/N/G took pains to avoid.

Are there faults to be found with the journal? There are. Some writers are better than others, and several of the more free-form entries in the "Artists' Musings" section sound self-indulgent, arcane, or dated: dissing Baudrillard made sense twenty years ago but means next to nothing now. More pertinent to the present, but also problematic, is the marked editorial bias in favor of painting as a medium, a bias sometimes phrased in terms of opposition to Conceptual or technology-based art.

True, much portentous noise had been made in the 1970s about the "death of the painting," but neither then nor later did the rhetoric correspond to the reality. You may not have liked the *kind* of painting on offer at any given moment in the 1980s or 1990s, but painting itself was always plentiful. More important, and this applies as a general rule, whenever critical discussion revolves primarily around advancing or denigrating a particular medium, substantive ideas about aesthetics and politics start to go out the window. In acknowledging the dominant presence of neo-Conceptualism and technology in the 1980s and 1990s only to reject it in favor of "hand-crafted" work, M/E/A/N/I/N/G offers a restricted and parochial view of an era.

This view has, in fact, interesting parallels at the present moment, as painting is being strenuously promoted by the mainstream New York art world and issue-based Conceptual art dismissed, for reasons that have far less to do with progressive impulses than with pumping up a nervous art market and some crypto-conservative critical careers. Some good work will naturally surface with this turn of the art-fashion wheel; it always does. But there is also a danger, in a continuing backlash against an institutionalized multiculturalism, that new art from the so-called Third World—often political in content and, for reasons of affordability and portability, photo-based or installational in format—will lose the hard-won international visibility it has gained over the past decade and be marginalized yet again by the economically privileged, so-called First World commercial-critical establishment.

As it happens, M/E/A/N/I/N/G will now have an opportunity to reconsider such issues and to explore many others. The journal has recently reappeared in online form. (http://www.artkrush.com/thearticles/024_meaning02/index.asp). And it is refreshing to see that, as if in direct response to a reactionary moment in the American cultural cycle, the theme of the first issue is a countercultural one of collaboration and collectivity as vehicles for art production. (A rich, long-view interview with Faith Wilding on the subject is particularly revelatory.) M/E/A/N/I/N/G is not now and has never been a presence powerful or radical enough to reshape the art world status quo. But it will surely give journals, editors, and artists of the future an alternative model to learn from, and a strong one: articulate, opinionated, against the grain in its thinking, and very often right.

1. "Dave Hickey with Sari Carel," *Zingmagazine* 14 (Winter 2001): 181. http://www.zing-magazine.com/zing14/hickey/09.html

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Dark Unfathomed Retrospect

Robert S. Slifkin

Michael Auping. *Philip Guston Retrospective.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003. Includes essays by Dore Ashton, Auping, Bill Berkson, Andrew Graham-Dixon, Philip Guston, Joseph Rishel, and Michael E. Shapiro. 271 pp., 158 color ills., 39 b/w. $50.

The hefty and copiously illustrated catalogue for the current Philip Guston retrospective comes as a welcome addition to the growing corpus of writing on an artist whose critical reputation is still to some degree undecided.[1] Guston is probably best known today for his famously infamous paintings from the 1970s in which the artist adopted a deliberately unrefined comic-book style and an idiosyncratic pictorial vocabulary. Born out of political anger and a sense of personal helplessness, these canvases offended many art world insiders by their refusal to acknowledge the accepted boundaries of modernism in their content and form. Yet these works, while arguably his most accomplished, encompass only thirteen years of a career that lasted half a century.

Guston's creative output can be separated into three discrete stylistic periods: Social Realism (1930–46), Abstract Expressionism (1947–66), and the iconoclastic figuration of his so-called late work (1967–80). Guston's artistic transformations were often seen as a lack of commitment, and despite critical acclaim from his contemporaries, his abstractions and early works are usually disregarded in modern surveys. More often the pre-1967 canvases are treated as mere precursors of Guston's late works and thus drained of any independent meaning or import. While Michael Auping's excellent selection of paintings and drawings in the Guston retrospective exhibition should demonstrate to museum visitors the emotional power and virtuosity in Guston's entire oeuvre, the essays in the accompanying catalogue unfortunately do little to help establish Guston's rightful place in the history of modern art.

Auping, chief curator of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and organizer of the exhibition, is no newcomer to Guston's