

## Introduction: ‘Asian’ Media Arts in/and New Zealand

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The idea for this themed issue first arose in response to local circumstances, these being the series of exhibitions held in various galleries around New Zealand during the 2004 New Zealand International Arts Festival. Exhibitions such as “Concrete Horizons: Contemporary Art from China” (Adam Art Gallery, 20 February – 9 May, 2004), “Mediarena: Contemporary Art from Japan” (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 21 February to 9 May), and “FRUiTS: Tokyo Street Style” (The Dowse Art Gallery, from 21 February to 30 May), consisting of contemporary media art from China and Japan, occurred within a short time of each other. Rightly or wrongly, this created an impression of a new engagement with, and interest in, the contemporary art and culture of these countries, from New Zealand. Editorial discussions ensued on what interesting subjects might be thrown up by an issue discussing Asian media arts in relation to New Zealand, as befitted a “local” journal. We hoped to elicit articles that reflected on this perception of renewed engagements with various Asias, perhaps problematising and recontextualising it, and making meaningful the complex intercultural dimensions that are still sometimes reduced to bland statements of “mutual cultural understanding” (for instance, in some artists’ exchange programmes). We hoped the topic might further suggest ways in which the critical discussion of New Zealand media could be situated in new contexts and dialogues.

An admittedly awkward phrase, the bringing together of these terms — “Asian’ Media Arts” on the one hand, and “New Zealand” on the other — was intended to suggest an area that, while specifically bounded, at the same time provided for a range of potential engagements, a multivalency helped along by the “in/and” operator. It was our hope that writing about the arts, under the hybrid sign of “media arts”, might provide alternative ways into thinking and discoursing about now familiar topics, such as globalisation, bi- and multi-culturalism, and cultural difference; that the presence of the quite wonderful media art from various elsewhere might encourage thinking about this place and the way in which media operate here, in different and subtle ways.

Contributors have risen to the challenge, responding to the call for papers in a range of ways. Themes of new media and difference; intercultural reception; identity, hybridity and the in-between; exchanges and interchange are all covered in this issue. Six new articles are included here, by writers addressing and responding not just to media art from these recent New Zealand exhibitions, but also those further afield (in Paris) or further back (ANZART and earlier Asia-Pacific gatherings), together with what might be called the remediation of cultural practices, and the artist’s ethical stance and responses. In this special issue, we are also pleased to be able to reprint essays by Gregory Burke and Fumio Nanjo that first appeared in the “Mediarena” catalogue. This is supplemented with an email interview Tony Schirato conducted with Kate Roberts of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Kylie Message addresses the photographs of contemporary Japanese artist Shoichi Aoki (in “FRUiTS”), and the work of New Zealand artist Shigeyuki Kihara. Along

the way, Message surveys a range of practices of appropriation, tourism and colonialism and discusses the tensions around New Zealand as constituted both by regionally specific ideas and practices and the homogenising pressures of a globalising world.

Responding perhaps to the recent enthusiasm for, and discovery of, regional arts exchange, Pamela Zeplin looks back to an earlier period of interest in the Asia-Pacific region, during the 1970s and 80s. Her historical review of the ANZART exhibitions reveals the period as a time of excitement. The shift away from authorised Euro-American models of art was a part of this, however, the significance of these shows, Zeplin argues, was that they marked “broader attitudes towards place and regional difference within the Tasman-Pacific”.

Henry Johnson and Guil Figgins’ article discusses the transplanting of the Indian Hindu festival of Diwali, the festival of lights. Johnson recounts the shifts Diwali has undergone since it began being presented as a public event in various New Zealand cities, reflecting on the way in which this recontextualisation encourages the performance of identity, in diaspora.

Inspired by two specific works -- Yin Xiuzhen’s “Portable Cities” (in “Concrete Horizons”) and exonemo’s “FragMental Storm” (in “Mediarena”) -- my own article addresses the ambivalence around technologies’ orderings of contemporary life, focussing particularly on the bodily-aesthetic experiences of displacement and re-emplacement resulting from travel, as well as some transformative uses of one of the most functional contemporary tools, the internet search engine.

Meditating on the poetics of doorways, walls and other built features, Keren Smith reviews two exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art, “Concrete Horizons” and “Alors la Chine”, the latter held in Paris as a part of the year of China in France. Urban renewal, commodification and consumption are amongst her many concerns, which are set against an awareness of the fraught histories of both colonialist exhibitions in France, and contemporary New Zealand encounters with China.

Jen Webb, who has previously written on another series of regional art exhibitions, the Asia-Pacific Triennials, here ponders relations between art, the mass media and ethics. Webb interrogates how to characterise the links between stories in the media, and the subject matter and response of artists to contemporary times, themes that she illustrates with interviews with two artists who have links to Asia and New Zealand, Lorraine Webb and Chaco Kato.

Given the themes of this issue it is fitting that it should appear in online form. Apart from enhancing the NZJMS’ accessibility both inside and outside of New Zealand, a web presence also promises to redefine the “localness” of the journal, and to generate new interfaces for the work published herein.

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