

UNEASY DIALOGUES ACROSS ANCIENT ART HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE IN THE AMERICAS

EDITORIAL

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ABSTRACT

The author lays out the problems and questions that prompted this special issue on “uneasy dialogues” across art history, archaeology, and contemporary art practice in the Americas. The art and visual culture of the Pre-Hispanic Americas is contested terrain. This essay discusses the temptation of “settler moves to innocence” in scholarship and in the contemporary art world. The author traces a surprising opportunity that emerges in a work by artist Gala Porras-Kim that, by accident, provides an ancient Moche captive bottle with conceptual liberation – not through return to bondage in northern Peru, but as escape to Yucatán. This text concludes by introducing the contents of this special issue that take the reader from the desert of New Mexico to the streets of Santiago de Chile.

KEYWORDS

Ancient American art history; Archaeology; Contemporary art; Settler moves to innocence.

I. Introduction

The past exists through conditions of the present, which are always in motion. The tissue that joins pasts and presents can be envisioned as a medium that grows thick and thin, dense and attenuated, as its living substance unfurls, doubles back, and extends again now quickly and then slowly through space and time. That living medium has itself taken historical form. The metaphoric shape of history has precipitated in tangible form through the work of writers, curators, and artists. Within the exhibition of her project *Estas ruinas que ves* at the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil in Mexico City in 2006–2007, for example, artist Mariana Castillo Deball (born in Mexico City, based in Berlin) plumbed found objects of museological display to call attention to histories of institutional mediation.¹ The artist arranged empty vitrines from museum storage and the hollow modern molds made from iconic Mesoamerican sculptures: the Mexica (or Aztec) goddess Coatlicue unearthed within Mexico City's Zócalo in 1790 and episodically reburied, a jaguar *cuauhxicalli*, a Toltec *chacmool*, and the colossal Olmec head now known as San Lorenzo no. 5. In their installation, the hollow molds appeared like shed skins discarded on the gallery floor. Neither ancient monument nor modern replica, the membrane of the mold constituted the material remains of the modern mediation.

Castillo Deball has continued to work with the subject of monuments, molds, and the series of *objetos incómodos* ("uneasy objects") that she creates in her engagements with them.² In *No solid form can contain you* (2010), which was part of the exhibition *Mariana Castillo Deball: Finding Oneself Outside* at the New Museum in 2019 [Fig. 1], the artist created a different image of Coatlicue. By casting fiberglass surfaces from the mold of the original and piecing them together, leaving external edges as seams, Castillo Deball produced a paradoxical object that appears at once as a cast of the original (yet only an empty shell) and a mold (although it is, in fact, a positive form). The segmented, riveted surface of the deity's body is a reflection on original and copy; on modern technologies of reproduction although in its own time the Pre-Hispanic sculpture was also one of multiples;³ and on the absconding of the original from local communities as the monolith was unearthed, reburied, and cast for

¹
Estas ruinas que ves / These Ruins You See (exh. cat. Mexico City, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes), ed. by Mariana Castillo Deball, Berlin/New York 2008, 122–151.

²
Catalina Lozano, *Atrapar el azar*, in: *Amarantus* (exh. cat. Mexico City, Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), ed. by Mariana Castillo Deball, Mexico City 2021, 13.

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Elizabeth H. Boone, *The "Coatlicues"* at the Templo Mayor, in: *Ancient Mesoamerica* 10/2, 1999, 189–206.



[Fig. 1]

Mariana Castillo Deball, *No solid form can contain you*, 2010, fiberglass, 250 × 120 × 120 cm. Installation view of Mariana Castillo Deball, *Finding Oneself Outside*, New Museum, New York, 2019. Photograph by Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio.

foreign display repeatedly since the nineteenth century.⁴ The work may inspire multiple connotations that traverse the temporality of the sculpture's making and remaking: the Mesoamerican warrior-goddess's armor and/or the flayed skin of the *ixiptla* (the divine likeness, the sacrificial victim); encasement as colonial bondage, Catholic extirpation, or scientific "trap";⁵ the manufactured modern Mexican icon echoing Diego Rivera's visions of Coatlicue as an axis of unification for American ancestry and industrialization in Detroit and San Francisco;⁶ or a chrysalis for the emergence of the goddess reborn as contemporary Chicana symbol.⁷ The mediating matrix that joins past and present is neither fossilized nor fibrotic. It can be a generative matrix for emergences of new work and new life, not in spite of the conflicted histories it contains but because of them.

As a matrix for new emergences, the generative medium between past and present is always a space of struggle. It is a space of contestation, colonization, negotiation, appropriation, dispossession, protest, recolonization, reconnection, and reappropriation – both between and within colonial and Indigenous constituencies. So, too, are academic approaches to the past subject to struggle and emergent practices. The writing of history has never been apolitical or devoid of contested claims to authority. This collection of essays is designed to address the alternately conflictive and convivial relationships between art history, archaeology, and art practice in conversations on visual culture in the Americas – emphasizing, but not limited to, the visual and artistic traditions of the ancient past of what is now considered Latin America (i.e., "Pre-Columbian" or "Ancient American" art and visual culture). In the Americas, ancient artistic traditions are pushed and pulled between competing disciplines and between incommensurate claims to knowledge both within the academy and in communities far beyond institutional walls.

One site of academic contestation is located at the intersection of art history and archaeology, where former disciplinary siblings have become increasingly estranged. Ancient American art history first began to take shape – in the United States and in Europe – in the first half of the twentieth century, within primitivism and the demands of the market for "non-Western" art objects. These studies had a debt to anthropology, which had claimed American antiquity

⁴
Jennifer Reynolds-Kaye, *Circulating Casts of the Coatlicue*. Mariana Castillo Deball's Unearthing of the Aztec Earth Goddess's History of Reproduction and Display, in: *Sculpture Journal* 28/3, 2019, 365–380.

⁵
Throughout her work, Castillo Deball has invoked the ideas of *ixiptla*, skin, and traps. See Lozano, *Atrapar el azar*.

⁶
The sculptural form of the goddess, juxtaposed or conflated with the machinery of the stamping press, is a focal point in Diego Rivera's mural cycles *Detroit Industry* (Detroit, 1932–1933) and *Pan-American Unity* (San Francisco, 1940).

⁷
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, San Francisco 1987.

as its subject in the late nineteenth century and did so with methods born out of racialized evolutionary science. Although many art historians and archaeologists alike have labored to reject the extractive and colonialist origins and ongoing practices of these academic fields – through postcolonial theorization, decolonial rhetoric, the emergence of the field of Indigenous Archaeology, and active community partnerships – the study of the deep American past and its visual traditions remains contested territory.

In most of the American hemisphere, archaeology remains a subdiscipline of anthropology, often to the exclusion of more historicist or humanistic approaches. In Peru, Chile, and many other Latin American nations, the study of the Pre-Hispanic past is the near-exclusive academic domain of archaeologists. With important exceptions, for example in Mexico and Colombia, ancient American art history does not have a substantial programmatic presence within Latin American universities. Although archaeology and art history once shared central methodological concerns of style and seriation, iconography, and epigraphy, their paths have diverged since the latter twentieth century.

In the divide, mistrust and misunderstanding have grown. Art historians may criticize archaeologists for taking images at apparent face value, ignoring their rhetorical capacities, or regarding their makers as less-than their modern Western counterparts. Archaeologists, in turn, may accuse art historians of exclusive focus on objects and aesthetics of elite social echelons. Some archaeologists repudiate research on objects in museum collections that were not brought to light through controlled excavations (i.e., unprovenienced objects); illicit excavations drive the antiquities market and destroy the irreplaceable data that can be obtained from archaeological contexts.

Yet archaeological insistence in object studies on “context” – which itself can be variably defined and is always subject to selection bias⁸ – is not a simple matter. It remains common for archaeologists in Latin America (both foreign and domestic) to recover objects from graves without adequate consultation with and consent from local communities. Such contextualized objects are often celebrated on display, but most often the bones of the dead are relegated indefinitely to boxes in museum storerooms. In some exceptional cases, by contrast – such as in the Museo de las Tumbas Reales de Sipán and the Museo Cao, both in northern Peru – the bodies of the most illustrious dead are displayed surrounded by their funerary goods, as if lying in state within the museum as a modern mausoleum. These Latin American practices are antithetical to widespread US and Canadian prohibitions on museum display of Indigenous human remains. But some Indigenous communities in the Americas

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As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson have written for art history, “context [...] is a text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretive choices.” Bal and Bryson, *Semiotics and Art History*, in: *The Art Bulletin* 73/2, 1991, 175.

proudly embrace the public display of the physical remains of their ancestors.⁹ Laws, ethics, and attitudes toward the treatment and exhibition of the remains of the dead and the objects that accompanied them beyond death do not track the same from nation to nation, or from community to community – just as the terms of Indigenous self-identification can vary dramatically across political and social boundaries.

In some recent work on the “archaeology of art” outside of Americanist settings, archaeologists have been quicker to address contemporary art than they have been to engage with scholarship in ancient art history.¹⁰ In the Americas since at least the 1990s,¹¹ and increasingly in the last decade, contemporary artists have undertaken fruitful collaborations with ancient Americanist and early colonial Latin Americanist art historians.¹² Recent collaborations between artists and museum curators – such as Castillo Deball’s interventions in museums in Mexico, the United States, and Europe – have underscored the value of research to artistic practice and have empowered artists to both critique and raise the stakes of contemporary scholarship. Collaborations that cross all three poles of art history, archaeology, and art practice, however, remain less common.

Are these academic differences irreconcilable? Must scholarship on the past now be seen through a fractured lens of disciplinary dealignment? To what extent do scholarly disagreements mirror political differences in the world beyond university halls and academic publications? And to what extent do they reveal their irrelevance to the lived experience of communities now and in the past? What, historically, have been the roles of modern artists, architects, designers, and other makers in joining – or further estranging – divergent perspectives on the past [Fig. 2]? What roles can contemporary artists – as both practitioners and intellectuals – play in bridging the academic gap between ancient American art history and archaeology, or in forging their own histories that leave the petty squabbles of academia by the wayside? Is it possible to imag-

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Lisa Overholtzer and Juan R. Argueta, Letting Skeletons out of the Closet. The Ethics of Displaying Ancient Mexican Human Remains, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24/5, 2018, 508–530.

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See, for example, Colin Renfrew, Chris Gosden and Elizabeth DeMarrais (eds.), *Substance, Memory, Display. Archaeology and Art*, Cambridge 2004; Ian Alden Russell and Andrew Cochrane (eds.), *Art and Archaeology. Collaborations, Conversations, Criticisms*, New York 2014.

11

The Chicano Codices. Encountering Art of the Americas (exh. cat. San Francisco, Mexican Museum), ed. by Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, San Francisco 1992.

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California-based artist Sandy Rodriguez’s engagement with art historian Diana Magaloni Kerpel’s scholarship on Bernardino de Sahagún’s “Florentine Codex” is a foundational part of the former’s creation of the Codex Rodríguez-Mondragón (2017–). See Ananda Cohen-Aponte and Ella Maria Diaz, Painting Prophecy. Mapping a Polyphonic Chicana Codex Tradition in the Twenty-First Century, in: *English Language Notes* 57/2, 2019, 22–42.



[Fig. 2]

Sofía Táboas, *Dorso*, 2011, Venetian tile, steel, cement, and brick, 90 × 200 × 120 cm (35.43 × 78.74 × 47.24 in). Installation view at Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, 2011. © Sofía Táboas and Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City. Photo by Agustín Estrada.

ine an integrated form of deep historical study, wherein distinct perspectives on the past can be brought into symphonic company? Since the arts have fundamentally shaped how American antiquity and its histories have been envisioned, artistic practice offers itself as one potential site of scrutiny, and possibly reconciliation, of the friction between academic disciplines and public imagination. But are contemporary art and design not also dependent on neoliberal social and economic orders? In what conditions have they escaped those dependencies?

For this special issue, I invited some of the most creative thinkers I know to address the conflicts – as well as the possibilities of productive intersections – between art history, archaeology, and art practice in their own work and as they view the dynamics of this triangulation at large. Based in the United States, Peru, and Chile, the contributing authors are art historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, curators, philosophers, and artists of varied backgrounds and subject positions. The terrain of their subjects ranges even farther – from rugged landscapes of northern New Mexico; to ivied university campuses; to the museums of Lima; to Maya Revival architecture and its contemporary reclamations in Los Angeles; to design studios of Mexico City and digital space; and the Chilean *estallido social* (“social explosion”) that ignited in the streets of Santiago in late 2019. Our conversations on these topics have unfolded in writing and through video calls, in both English and Spanish, since October 2020, to produce the collection of texts that appears in this issue.

II. Decolonization, Desire, Discomfort

In a 2019 essay, I suggested that “in its future tense”, Pre-Columbian art history “bears significant decolonizing potential”.¹³ Four years later, I am not so sanguine. At least, I am not so sanguine about the capacity of academic projects, especially those developed within the neoliberal institutions of the university, to decolonize much of anything since “to truly decolonize an institution or self would entail a radical undoing”.¹⁴ So-called decolonizing historical projects that expand, revise, diversify, or critique institutions and traditions based in colonialism are distinct from – and should not be conflated with – the actual work of repatriating Indigenous land and life. In non-Indigenous hands, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have so cogently written, decolonial metaphors – however well-intentioned and however important as historical critique – more often than not ultimately serve the interests of “settler futurity”, through

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Lisa Trever, Pre-Columbian Art History in the Age of the Wall, in: *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 1/1, 2019, 100.

¹⁴

Renée Green (quoting Howie Chen) in conversation with Iman Issa, in: Huey Copeland, Hal Foster, David Joselit, and Pamela M. Lee, A Questionnaire on Decolonization, in: *October* 174, 2020, 3–125, at 59.

the satisfaction of settler desires and “settler moves to innocence”.¹⁵ And yet, the decolonial rhetoric that Tuck and Yang warned against more than a decade ago is actively proliferating in many areas of academic scholarship including Latin American and Latinx art history and visual studies.¹⁶

As a white, US-born person descended from European immigrants of modest means who fled economic and political hardships between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s; who was born outside of New York City and grew up in a rural upstate town that – as the setting of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–1841) – was once a literary cradle of North American settler mythologies;¹⁷ and who now occupies a privately endowed position in a university named allegorically for Columbus, in a place that still bears an ancestral Lenape name (Manahatta, the island of hills), within a city that has become one of the most powerful centers of global capitalism, it would certainly be a conspicuous move to innocence to continue to suggest, even obliquely and despite my best intentions and critical commitments, that my academic work is commensurate with decolonization. It is more useful and surely more honest to sit with the discomfort of one’s own settler position than to try to elide it; to resist facile narratives of innocence or white saviorhood that insidiously create yet further colonization; to “stay with the trouble”;¹⁸ to acknowledge the limits of what academic work on the history of *ante*-colonial art of the Americas can and cannot faithfully achieve; and to fortify the anti-colonial commitments that it can nonetheless serve. I maintain that nuanced academic study of the ancient and Indigenous artistry in the Americas, while not a “decolonizing project”, is a valuable critical project,¹⁹

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Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor, in: *Decolonization. Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1/1, 2012, 1–40. In their words, a “settler move to innocence” can be explained as “a settler desire to be made innocent, to find some mercy or relief in face of the relentlessness of settler guilt and haunting”. Ibid., 9.

¹⁶

Copeland, Foster, Joselit, and Lee, A Questionnaire on Decolonization; Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, Decolonizing Art History, in: *Art History* 43/1, 2020, 8–66.

¹⁷

“The *Tales* are credited with the constructions of the vanishing Indian, the resourceful Frontiersman, and the degenerate Negro: the pivotal triad of archetypes that forms the basis for an American national literature.” Tuck and Yang, Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor, 15. Cooperstown, New York has been touted as “America’s Most Perfect Village”, which is an image deliberately cultivated through long-term private patronage. See Nicholas Fox Weber, *The Clarks of Cooperstown*, New York 2007. The settler history that haunts its idyllic appearance surfaces ominously in Lauren Groff’s novel *The Monsters of Templeton*, New York 2008.

¹⁸

Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, NC 2016.

¹⁹

Despite my skepticism toward what can be superficial “decolonial” rhetoric within academia, I find useful Zehra Jumabhoy’s wish to “de-colonialize” art history as a “discipline (with all its contradictions) [that] remains a space to be argued for”. Zehra Jumabhoy, responding to questions posed by the authors in Grant and Price, Decolonizing Art History, 31. In her words: “De-colonializing art history is about letting counter-examples disturb

“especially in the form of pedagogy and outreach”,²⁰ and all the more still, now in the early 2020s, as xenophobia has grown even more intense worldwide. This set of essays continues in that spirit, in its attention to conversations across academia and contemporary art practice that “open discussions about appropriation and authenticity – from the works of early twentieth-century modernists to contemporary Latinx artist-activists – and about competing claims to Pre-Columbian art and the authority to interpret and even reinvent its meanings in the present”.²¹

Modern and contemporary artists have long invoked the forms of ancient Latin American art in their own work especially at critical times in social, political, and art history. These have included nineteenth-century nationalism projects within Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere; early-twentieth-century primitivism and modern design in the United States and Europe; 1930s Mexican *mestizaje*; the Chicano Movement since the 1970s; and critical reflections on the Columbian Quincentenary in the early 1990s.²² The upswing in the number of recent exhibitions and gallery shows of works by contemporary artists and curators who are reengaging Pre-Hispanic and early modern Indigenous art of Latin America in their practices suggests that we are now within another of these critical periods of interest. A significant rise of Latinx and Indigenous art in the museum world was driven by exhibitions supported by the Getty’s *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA* initiative in California (2017–2018) and marked in New York by the exhibition *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art* (2018), curated by Marcela Guerrero with Alana Hernandez at the Whitney Museum. When I first composed this essay during the last days of 2021, several such exhibitions and projects were on view: Denver Art Museum’s *ReVisión: Art in the Americas* (showing ancient to contemporary works, principally from the permanent collections); LACMA’s *Mixpantli: Contemporary Echoes* (a companion to *Mixpantli: Space, Time, and the Indigenous Origins of Mexico*); Castillo Deball’s retrospective *Amarantus* at the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City; the temporary *Intervenciones contemporáneas* installations within the permanent galleries of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI); as well as the sound installation *El eterno retorno. Interacciones prehispánicas* in the adjacent Parque de la Exposición; *Sandy*

canonical facts: it is a refusal to allow the myths of Euro-American art history to be taken at face value.” Ibid., 32.

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Treuer, Pre-Columbian Art History, 103.

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Ibid.

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Much has been written about these histories. See, for example, Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World. Ancient American Sources of Modern Art*, New York 1993; Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, Tucson, AZ 1996; Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture. Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State*, Durham, NC 2012; Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art. The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Durham, NC 2007.

Rodríguez in Isolation at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas; and Gala Porras-Kim's *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* in the Amant Foundation galleries in Brooklyn. These exhibitions represented close collaborations between artists and curators within the institutional spaces of art museums, universities, galleries, and private foundations as well as the centering of social and ethical questions rooted in historical research.²³ At the same time, gallery interest in the works of contemporary Indigenous Amazonian artists – such as Sheroanawe Hakihiwe (Yanomami), Lily Sandoval Panduro (Shipibo-Konibo), Celia Vásquez Yui (Shipibo-Konibo), and Rember Yahuarcani (Uitoto) – has been gaining astonishing speed, even as millenarian traditions have at times been, perplexingly, shown under the title of “outsider art”,²⁴ recalling the central problematic of Castillo Deball's *Finding Oneself Outside*.

In her recent work, Gala Porras-Kim (born Bogotá, active Los Angeles) unsettles institutional practices of archaeological excavation, removal, and curation of the remains of the dead and the objects that once resided within tombs, temples, and living landscapes.²⁵ In *Proposal for the Reconstituting of Ritual Elements for the Sun Pyramid at Teotihuacan* (2019), Porras-Kim petitioned Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia to place her replicas of two monoliths within the empty spaces left by the removal of the originals from the temple. In another work – *Leaving the Institution through Cremation Is Easier than as a Result of a Deaccession Policy* (2021) – she wrote a formal letter to the director of the National Museum of Brazil, pleading for him to release the bones of “Luzia”, one of the oldest known human inhabitants of the Americas, which had been burned in the 2018 museum inferno, to allow what remained of her body to rest in peace instead of kept as an object of science. Working as a “spiritual coroner”,²⁶ Porras-Kim asks questions rarely posed in Americanist archaeology: What do the dead now desire? Can one litigate on behalf of Mesoamerican divinities? Who will defend the property rights of the rain?

The latter question underlies Porras-Kim's series *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* (2021), wherein she symbolically returns to the Maya rain deity the precious objects that Harvard archaeologists

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Many recent exhibitions on these themes have been supported by major institutions and universities with substantial private funding, unlike most earlier Chicano/a projects of art making and social critique.

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Will Heinrich, *The Outsider Art Fair 2020: 7 Must-See Exhibits*, in: *New York Times*, January 17, 2020.

25

Gala Porras-Kim, *Artist Talk*, Harvard Radcliffe Institute, September 25, 2019; Carlos Museum, Emory University, *In This Moment. Dr. Megan E. O'Neil, Carlos Museum Faculty Curator, Speaks to Artist Gala Porras-Kim*, October 6, 2020.

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Travis Diehl, *Spiritual Coroner: Gala Porras-Kim*, in: *Carla (Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles)* 20, 2020, 4–11.

dredged out of the Cenote Sagrado of Chichen Itza more than a century ago and that are today held in that university's Peabody Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology. Porras-Kim interrogates the institutional history of the expedition and the legal and ethical questions that underlay it. Through multiple panels depicting precious objects made of greenstone, copper, gold, and copal – as well as human and animal bones – the artist endeavors to return their likenesses to Chaac [Fig. 3]. It is notable that she advocates on behalf of the divine authority and not the possible desires of the people whose bodies were cast (one might assume, unwillingly) into the cenote together with the riches they wore. Porras-Kim invites the divinity's presence into the gallery – channeled through a slab-like sculpture of copal mixed with museum dust that is irrigated with local rainwater – to reclaim this pictorialized property. Throughout these works and others, Porras-Kim renders symbolically the otherwise impossible returns of museum collections – returned to the ground, restored to the pyramid, submerged once more in the watery depths of the cenote – that exceed even the most liberal policy proposals for return, restitution, and repatriation.²⁷

Public support for the return of collections to the nations or communities from which cultural objects were taken appears to be growing stronger day by day, accelerated by France's 2018 report on the restitution of African cultural heritage.²⁸ Of course, the physical return of collections to a nation or community is not an undoing of colonial history. These acts do not bring back the dead. They do not recuperate the scattered bones of long-ago plundered graves. "The trauma [...] cannot be undone."²⁹ Nor do return, restitution, and repatriation signify the same from nation to nation, community to community within a nation, or even from object to object. Closer attention can draw out complications in narratives of national return.

Consider, for example, a Moche ceramic stirrup-spout bottle that was made on the north coast of Peru around 500–850 CE and that today also resides in Harvard's Peabody Museum [Fig. 4].³⁰

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Pierre Losson usefully differentiates between "return" (return to a nation of objects that were removed prior to international conventions or national laws governing the protection of cultural heritage), "restitution" (return to a nation of objects that were removed after the implementation of such conventions and laws), and "repatriation" (return of objects to communities of origin, either within or across national boundaries). Pierre Losson, *The Return of Cultural Heritage to Latin America. Nationalism, Policy, and Politics in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru*, London 2022, 3–5.

28

Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain. Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle*, November 2018.

29

Aaron M. Hyman and Dana Leibsohn, Washing the Archive, in: *Early American Literature* 55/2, 2020, 422.

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The accession card in the museum's registration documentation indicates that it came from either the Virú or Chicama Valleys of northern Peru. I thank Laura Costello for her remote research assistance during the pandemic.



[Fig. 3]

Gala Porras-Kim, *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape*, 2021, copal, dust from the Peabody Museum storage, institutional structure for rainwater; 254 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 615 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 931 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum; 2576 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum, 2021, color pencil and Flashe paint on paper. Exhibition view at the Amant Foundation, Brooklyn, December 2021. Photograph by author.



[Fig. 4]

Unnamed Moche maker (northern Peru), Stirrup-spout bottle in the shape of a puma attacking a nude prisoner with foreigner face paint, ca. 500–850, ceramic, 27 × 21 × 19 in. Gift of the Friends of the Museum, 1916. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 16-62-30/F727.

The body of the bottle was sculpted into an image of two figures. A seated man, stripped of his clothing, the red glans of his penis seen between his knees and a rope cord around his neck, is attacked by a puma that prepares to sink claws and fangs into the captive flesh. Within the visual traditions of Moche art, the puma was a powerful predator that served as allegory for martial domination as well as sacrificial practices. The puma's victim looks skyward, his eyes rolled back and mouth agape. The forelock of his hair and the face paint affiliate the man with neighboring communities in the northern highlands.³¹

The museum purchased the bottle in 1916 from anthropology alumnus Julio C. Tello, born in Huarochirí, Peru, who had acquired collections on behalf of Harvard. Tello has been widely hailed as “Americas first indigenous archaeologist”,³² although the adjective Indigenous (*indígena*) is one that many Peruvian communities descended from the Incas and other Pre-Hispanic groups have historically rejected and continue to avoid.³³ As the art market today increasingly celebrates the works of Indigenous artists, it is important to remember that that descriptor is not one that has been universally embraced by all communities with millennia-long histories in the Americas. Although some regard Tello as the authoritative prototype for the modern, scientific archaeologist in Peru, his own attitudes toward the extraction and sale of antiquities were, at least early in his career, ambiguous.³⁴ Tello was a vocal critic of grave robbers (*huaqueros*), but we know that he did not acquire this bottle through the kind of controlled excavation that he espoused and for which he has become known.

Like the history of this ancient Moche bottle's acquisition, the implications of its hypothetical repatriation are also paradoxical. If the bottle were returned to Peru, it would become property of the nation. It might end up in the new Museo Nacional (MUNA), near

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Janusz Z. Wołoszyn, *Enemy – Stranger – Neighbour. The Image of the Other in Moche Culture*, Oxford 2021, 51–52. See also *Moche y sus vecinos. Reconstruyendo identidades* (exh. cat. Lima, Museo de Arte de Lima), ed. by Cecilia Pardo and Julio Rucabado, Lima 2016.

³²

Richard L. Burger (ed.), *The Life and Writings of Julio C. Tello. America's First Indigenous Archaeologist*, Iowa City 2009. Tello's role in South American archaeology is still intransigently racialized in its celebration: “A full-blooded native Peruvian *serrano*, a highlander, he was a true genius.” Jeffrey Quilter, *The Ancient Central Andes*, Abingdon, Oxon/New York 2014, 14. Tello himself often encouraged this narration of his identity. Christopher Heaney, *Seeing Like an Inca. Julio C. Tello, Indigenous Archaeology, and Pre-Columbian Trepanation in Peru*, in: Ned Blackhawk and Isaiah Lorado Wilner (eds.), *Indigenous Visions. Rediscovering the World of Franz Boas*, New Haven, CT/London 2018, 344–376.

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Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos. The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991*, Durham, NC 2000; Frank Salomon, *Unethnic Ethnohistory. On Peruvian Peasant Historiography and Ideas of Autochthony*, in: *Ethnohistory* 49/3, 2002, 475–506; Walther Maradiegue, *Lo Moche en el museo. Etnicidad y neoliberalismo en la costa norte peruana*, in: Gisela Cánepa Koch and Leonor Lamas Zoeger (eds.), *Épicas del neoliberalismo. Subjetividades emprendedoras y ciudadanías precarias en el Perú*, Lima 2020, 199–216.

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Raúl H. Asensio, *Señores del pasado. Arqueólogos, museos y huaqueros en el Perú*, Lima 2018, 122–124.

Pachacamac, some 650 kilometers south of its likely origin place. Conceivably, one day archaeologists might be able to identify the original site of the bottle's origins through chemical analyses of paste or paint. Perhaps even – as we extend this mental exercise – the bottle could be repatriated to the north coast to the very Moche *huaca* or even to the specific tomb where it may have been laid at the side of the deceased (their long-ago discarded bones somehow recovered); or to the palace within which it had once sat; or to the ceramics workshop where its image was molded, painted, burnished, detailed by hand, and fired. But would the reversal of the object's voyage to its precise place of origin constitute the decolonization (real or rhetorical) of its human *subject* – the abject figure of the highland man in bondage? This imagined relay of repossession would return the subject's likeness back into the hands of his captors.

By a historical accident of museum documentation, this bottle and another burnished blackware Moche prisoner bottle sneaked like stowaways into Porras-Kim's artistic return of the Harvard objects to the Cenote Sagrado.³⁵ These two vessels – the latter collected decades after the former³⁶ – had been photographed in the Peabody Museum in the early 1980s, together with a copper disc from the Cenote Sagrado [Fig. 5],³⁷ and thus entered the object files that the artist consulted in her research for *342 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum*, in the series *Precipitation for an Arid Landscape* [Fig. 6]. In her rendering of the man beset by the puma, Porras-Kim omitted his genitals, not easily discernible in the low-res digital photograph in the museum file, removing the humiliation of his bodily exposure. The unintentional reappropriation of these Moche bottles to the Maya divinity creates a surprising detour for thinking through their imagined return. Might these ceramic prisoners have *preferred* this escape to Yucatán over repatriation to Peru? If we were to ask what these objects “want”³⁸ – that now-common rhetorical question that is especially fraught in colonial settings – it might be that what these ceramic prisoners *want* is not return, but liberation.

This conjectural rumination on subaltern objects' possible desires for escape is not an argument against return or repatria-

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I thank Gala Porras-Kim, Hugo Ikehara-Tsukayama, and Rachel Chamberlin for conversations on this particular happenstance, which I only became aware of late in the writing of this essay.

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The blackware vessel is catalogued in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University as 46-77-30/4980. Sam Lothrop collected it in Peru on behalf of the museum in the early 1940s. It was reportedly from the Hacienda Sausal in the Chicama Valley.

37

The photograph [Fig. 5] is attributed to museum staff photographer Hillel Burger. Laura Costello, email message to the author, March 9, 2022.

38

Martha Buskirk, *The Ethics of Dust*, in: *Artforum International* 60/7, 2022, 146–153.



[Fig. 5]

Late twentieth-century photograph of two Moche ceramic bottles from Peru on either side of a metal disk from the Cenote Sagrado of Chichen Itza, Mexico. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 16-62-30/F727, 10-71-20/C7412A, 46-77-30/4980.



[Fig. 6]

Gala Porras-Kim, 342 Offerings for the Rain at the Peabody Museum, 2021, color pencil and Flashe paint on paper. Photograph by author.

tion. Nor am I suggesting that Moche vessels should actually be tossed into cenotes. Rather, this example illustrates how repatriation in itself is neither the end nor the undoing of colonial processes. Objects like these have navigated the complexities of political worlds for millennia prior to their overseas removal and curation in the modern era. As national patrimony, works from internal subaltern traditions of deeper antiquity retain a status as colonized objects.³⁹ But there are hopeful prospects for anti-colonial forward motion. Resisting settler moves to innocence – be they individual or institutional⁴⁰ – requires “unsettling”⁴¹ what may be satisfying narratives that gloss over inconvenient complications. Forward motion requires uneasy conversations that keep differences, difficulties, and discomfort productively at the fore.

III. *Diálogos incómodos*. From the Desert to the Streets

The articles in this special issue begin in the desert of New Mexico and end with explosions in the streets of Santiago. Through these pages, the authors move widely through space within what is now the United States and Latin America: from penitent landscapes, into museums and institutional histories, to move again away from universities and museums to site-based installations, design studios, community spaces, digital environments, public landscapes, and city streets in revolt. As such, matters of place are central to each article. The articles are followed by a conversation (“debate”) in Lima, Peru between a curator, artist, and philosopher on the meaning of ancient American art and aesthetics now.⁴²

Several themes run through these essays, although none are absolute. As guest editor, I encouraged the authors to take their contributions in whichever directions they felt called, without prescribing a particular pathway or vocabulary, without mandating a common destination, and without trying to package the results into a tidy bundle. My opening academic questions generated respon-

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On the internal dislocation of monuments as national patrimony, see Sandra Rozental, *On the Nature of Patrimonio*. “Cultural Property” in Mexican Contexts, in: Jane Anderson and Haidy Geismar (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Cultural Property*, Abingdon, Oxon 2017, 237–257.

⁴⁰

The upswing in major institutional support for reflexive contemporary art projects coincides with a time of increasing public support for repatriation and rewritings of master narratives of art history. Without substantial reform of policies and practices, however, such support can be seen as institutional “settler moves to innocence” that defer critical responsibility for change onto artists and temporary exhibitions, while maintaining the corporate status quo. For a parallel discussion of museum interventions by contemporary artists with African collections, see Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, responding to questions posed by the authors in Copeland, Foster, Joselit, and Lee, *A Questionnaire on Decolonization*, 90–93.

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Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, 3.

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I thank Catherine Nuckols for her assistance with this issue’s cover design by Kaj Lehmann, which is based on numeration used in the Post-Classic Maya *Dresden Codex*.

ses that are as political and personal as they are scholarly. The responses are neither formulaic nor forced. They do not settle into a single conclusion or resolve with orchestral satisfaction. Some stay close to the initial prompt. Others touch upon it only obliquely. In this collection of texts, the reader will find neither easy answers nor ready consensus on the questions of disciplinary relationships between art and archaeology, the roles of contemporary art making, or competing claims to the past and its visual traditions. None of the authors settle for simple decolonial metaphors. Rather, in their texts, one can sense what Tuck and Yang call an “ethic of incommensurability”. That ethic, “which guides moves that unsettle innocence, stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation, which motivate settler moves to innocence”.⁴³ Throughout these pages, the reader will find shared emphases on image making and mediation; aesthetics and value; collecting and curation; the shifting semiotics and politics of appropriation and reappropriation; the sensoriality of embodied experiences through movement and gesture; effects of dislocation and dispossession; and artistic processes over the physical products of art.

In the first essay, “Catholic Kinaestheology”, archaeologists Darryl Wilkinson and Severin Fowles present a study of Catholic images in rock art made by penitent pilgrims along the Via Crucis within the New Mexican desert in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through discussion of embodied practices of religious image making – both pictorial and gestural – as well as their later prohibition (iconoclasm as well as “chiroclasm”), Wilkinson and Fowles offer us a rich discussion of image making as religious action, which they interpret within a frame of “kinaes-theology”. In “Some Thoughts on Latin American Art History in the United States. Colleges and Collections, 1870–2021”, art historian Mary Miller takes the reader through a tour of the little-known history of Latin American art history on US college and university campuses from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Miller reveals the essential roles of collecting and photography in early university instruction – more central to art history than to other disciplines that were better served by the printing press – which has been revolutionized by new technologies for reproducing works of art. In the next essay, “Ritual Object, Funerary Offering, Work of Art. The Place of the Pre-Columbian Past in the History of Art in Peru”, archaeologist and curator Cecilia Pardo guides the reader through a parallel account of early collecting and display of ancient Andean art in Lima. This important text appears here in translation from the 2020 Spanish original.⁴⁴ The projects that Pardo and her collea-

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Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, 35.

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Cecilia Pardo Grau, Objeto ritual, ofrenda funeraria, obra de arte. El lugar del pasado precolombino en la historia del arte en el Perú, in: Marco Curatola Petrocchi, Cécile Michaud, Joanne Pillsbury, and Lisa Trever (eds.), *El arte antes de la historia. Para una historia del arte andino antiguo*, Lima 2020, 213–233.

gues at the MALI produced in the form of temporary exhibitions and permanent galleries – unknown to readers who have not had the good fortune to visit Lima multiple times in recent years – manifest the potential for collaborative partnership (*convivencia*) between archaeology and art history. In the service of the public, she reminds us, the “old, false opposition between art and archaeology” is already obsolete.

The issue continues with “*Ch’u Mayaa* and the Appropriation of the Past”, in which filmmaker and writer Jesse Lerner discusses Frank Lloyd Wright’s disavowal of creative debts to ancient American architecture and contemporary artist Clarissa Tossin’s (born Porte Alegre, Brazil, active Los Angeles) reappropriation of Wright’s Hollyhock House. Working with dancer and choreographer Crystal Sepúlveda, Tossin cites the imagery and gestures of ancient Maya art in their reclamation of Wright’s Maya Revival building (built on ancestral Chumash land that is now the globalized landscape of southern California) on behalf of ancient America. Lerner’s essay draws out the layers of appropriation, reappropriation, and disappropriation – the latter term borrowed from the writing of Cristina Rivera Garza – in the works of Wright, Tossin, and Lerner’s own collaboration with Mariana Castillo Deball and others in the project *Never Odd or Even*. In “Contemporaneity and Composition in Mexican Design”, anthropologist and curator of design Robert J. Kett puts to work critical terms from Paul Rabinow (contemporaneity) and Bruno Latour (compositionism) to explore contemporary debates over design, heritage, and public culture in Mexico. He engages ethnographically with a series of cases that include recent changes to Mexican copyright law on Indigenous design as well as the work of contemporary studios. Intended to protect Indigenous makers, the recent law would place management of design as cultural property in the hands of the state. As practitioners reckon with “design’s own positionality” in today’s environment, others have challenged the state’s role in the management of official culture through explorations of *lo popular* as well as dematerialized digital spaces where popular appropriation is positively encouraged as a means of resisting the modern order of twentieth-century cultural policy.

The articles continue with “‘Desobediencia es habitar la revuelta’. Revisitando la rebelión de los artefactos en el Chile del siglo XXI” (“‘To Disobey Is to Inhabit Revolt’. Revisiting the Revolt of the Objects in Twenty-First-Century Chile”), by archaeologist, anthropologist, art historian, and photographer Flora Vilches. In this powerful piece, Vilches takes the reader with her into the streets of Santiago during the massive social uprisings that exploded in October 2019. She frames the role of “disobedient” objects in the hands of protestors revolting against the neoliberal capitalist order as a contemporary version of the ancient Moche “Revolt of the Objects” – a pan-American myth of things turning against their masters during times of crisis. In the disobedience of the *estallido social* – the collective outrage, the risk of serious violence at the hands of the police,

the transformations of urban landscapes, and the largely anonymous visual production that widely invoked Mapuche symbols and history – Vilches describes decolonizing acts that do not rest upon metaphor. As an archaeologist, she sees the events in Chile as an opportunity to “archaeologically explore one of the failed projects of capitalist modernity” (“explorar arqueológicamente uno de los proyectos fallidos de la modernidad capitalista”) through the “constant succession of ephemeral events at a vertiginous pace that left material traces of very little permanence” (“constante sucesión de eventos efímeros a ritmo vertiginoso que dejaban rastros materiales de muy baja permanencia”). As an art historian, she observes how quickly the curation of those visual and material remains of the uprisings began, what was marked and selected for preservation, and how those preservationist filters often served to reinscribe social inequality. Invoking a frequent phrase from the uprising (“Mata a tu paco interior” [Kill your inner cop]), which reminds us that the power of the state has the potential to operate through each of us to perpetuate inequality, Vilches insists that we remember that “we always make choices, and for each thing we select, we always leave something else by the way” (“siempre hacemos elecciones y, por todo aquello que seleccionamos, siempre dejamos algo de lado”). In challenging internalized prejudices and blind spots, she suggests, the disobedience of the revolt might become an enduring way of life.

The articles are followed by an important conversation (“debate”) on this issue’s central questions between Ulla Holmquist – director of the Museo Larco in Lima – and artist Kukuli Velarde (born Cusco, active Philadelphia) with art philosopher Carolina Luna. Their dialogical contribution “Encontrar nuestra propia estética. Una conversación acerca de los límites de las disciplinas y las posibilidades de lo ‘precolombino’” (To Find Our Own Aesthetic. A Conversation about the Limits of Disciplines and the Possibilities of the “Pre-Columbian”) contains cogent critiques of both academic disciplines – archaeology for its othering, taxonomic stasis; art history for its Eurocentrism – as well as the coloniality of the university at large. Out of the critique emerges a highly compelling discussion of the possibilities that they see in ancient American art for the rediscovery of identity and an autochthonous “aesthetic” – by which they mean beauty but also a profound sense of knowledge, ethics, and self-possessed worth – as anti-colonial practice in art making, curation, and education. They call for recognition of aesthetic continuity – not as stasis of form or meaning, but as a continuity of the dynamic force of aesthetic creativity – as “loving self-recognition” (“auto-reconocimiento cariñoso”).

When I invited these authors to comment on the state of the art/archaeology divide and to discuss how contemporary art and design practice might intervene to open new avenues for thinking through the ancient American past, I expected that we might come away with an expanded set of best practices for interdisciplinary scholarship in the twenty-first century. That is not what has hap-

pened. At least not as I had envisioned it. The authors took the prompt and they turned it over, considered it, redirected it, wrote through it, plowed past it, and at times exploded it. What has emerged instead is an exceedingly thoughtful and thought-provoking collection of texts that are more unruly and, as a result, far more meaningful.

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