M/E/A/N/I/N/G 25th Anniversary Edition

Introduction

We started M/E/A/N/I/N/G in 1986 as an intervention into a particularly charged political and discursive moment when the accelerating hype of the 1980s art market marched in curious tandem with institutional and commodity critiques often announced in obdurate and obscure theory language. If “intervention” was one buzz word of the day — defining a limited political act distinct from the large utopian movements for social change of the 1960s and 1970s — “irony” was another, contributing to a moral equivalency and destabilizing humanistic concepts including that of meaning itself.

From the subscription flyer for issue No. 1:

M/E/A/N/I/N/G

edited by Susan Bee and Mira Schor

M/E/A/N/I/N/G is a new biannual publication committed to reorienting the critical discussion of contemporary visual art. Our focus is on art and writing about art that labors to deepen the visual articulation of meaning: how works of art resubstantiate rather than evacuate. In this way we aim to extend the investigation of alternatives to predetermined styles of representation and con-figuration. Featuring articles by artists, poets, art critics, historians, and theorists. M/E/A/N/I/N/G is funded solely by reader subscriptions.

Our first issue, published in December 1986, includes essays by Charles Bernstein (on the failures of contemporary art criticism); Johanna Drucker (on Lyotard as postmodern curator); Alan Davies, Lee Sherry and Jake Berthot (on Porfirio DiDonna); Vanalynne Green (on "mother baseball"), Mira Schor (on the misogynist imagery of David Salle), Rene Santos (from his notebooks), as well as works by Mimi Gross and Susan Bee.

Our second issue is scheduled for the summer of 1987.

Make checks out to, or send queries to:

Mira Schor
60 Lispenard Street
New York, NY 10013

OR

Susan Bee
464 Amsterdam Avenue #4R
New York, NY 10024

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M/E/A/N/I/N/G has been a collaboration between two artists, both painters with expanded interests in writing and politics, and an extended community of artists, art critics, historians, theorists, and poets, whom we sought to engage in discourse and to give a voice to. Over the years we created a community of M/E/A/N/I/N/G. It once existed in a red plastic index card file box, later in a primitive mailing list program, then an e-mail list, and now is also reconstituted in our online friendships.

The first issue of M/E/A/N/I/N/G: A Journal of Contemporary Art Issues, was published in December 1986. We published 20 issues biannually over ten years. In 2000, M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism was published by Duke University Press. In 2002 we began to publish M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online and have published four previous online issues. The M/E/A/N/I/N/G archive from 1986 to 2002 is in the collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Our 25th anniversary comes at an unusual moment following upon a series of traumatic political events and a decade of war. It is a moment of global economic crisis, failure of capitalism and of progressive political movements, a moment of political impasse, and of generational shift. Methods of communication have changed since we began our project 25 years ago and concepts of privacy and individuality seem to be in a process of radical transformation.

We began planning this issue in the way we had planned other forums in the past: we discussed and tried to formulate our specific personal concerns and our sense of general contemporary concerns into questions and themes that we would invite a spectrum of artists to respond to. Our mutual and separate lines of thought and feeling merged into two themes:

**Theme 1**

How do public traumas like 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise in income inequality in the U.S., and the current recession affect, or frame, the production of your art works and art criticism? What is the role of individual style or idiosyncrasy in these times and circumstances? What is the role of the art market/fashion/art history versus such public or individual/idiosyncratic motivations and frames?

**Theme 2**

How do artistic intuition, creativity, community, production, and distribution function for you in the age of digital corporate conglomerates and the web 2.0? What is the nature
of privacy for the artist or critic working in the age of social networking and global spectacle?

We were surprised and delighted by the enthusiastic response to our initial invitation sent out in mid-August to a wide spectrum of artists, critics, historians, theorists, and poets, some who had written for our journal before and many new artists and writers whose work we have encountered in recent years.

Many people, perceiving a fluid relation between the questions of trauma and of privacy that perhaps was inherent to our own thinking all along, addressed both of our suggested themes in their responses. Therefore we have organized the issue alphabetically rather by theme.

We are honored to publish the responses we have received. People wrote what they really thought and felt, each very individually, many clearly inspired and energized by the Occupy Wall Street movement, which began September 17th in Lower Manhattan and has rapidly sent a wave of optimism around the world.

Susan Bee and Mira Schor
New York City, November 2011

Anne Swartz

Islamic Art, 9/11, and Me

The events of 9/11, used as catalyst for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, figured into my scholarly and critical history in the past decade much more than I expected. In December of 2001, I traveled from my home in Georgia with my husband and son to NYC to complete some research on Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) for a book project on new media art. I was interviewing Billy Klüver and Julie Martin. It was magical to meet them and discuss their work. But in a NYC still filled with fire fighter memorials and flyers depicting the missing, devastation hung in every step, conversation, and corner. I began asking artists in their studios how 9/11 had influenced them. To a person, each welcomed the opportunity to discuss the impact, remarking that it seemed taboo. Remember the year was 2001, so the hundreds of exhibitions about the impact of 9/11 hadn’t happened yet.
For my Fulbright year in Japan in 2002 to 2003, I gave my lecture “American Art after 9/11” eleven times. I could have given that lecture another twenty times if I had apportioned the time. The interest was intense. I returned from Japan and realized I had a great deal of material on the increased relevance of abstraction in memorializing the events of 9/11. I wrote it up into an article, which was published in *sympleke* in 2006. That article gets more hits than almost anything else I have written.

I curated an exhibition on the Pattern and Decoration movement, or P&D, at the Hudson River Museum, NY, where it was shown from October 2007 to January 2008. It was a triumph for me; the key artists participated, the show was reviewed well in national publications, and a catalogue produced. It wasn’t a perfect experience, because there is never enough money, energy, or time, but it was thrilling and the work looked amazing. In the run-up to the exhibition, I met Oleg Grabar, a highly regarded scholar of Islamic art and one of the small pantheon of immortals — impressive resident scholars at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Princeton. He hosted me for lunch at the Institute. All the visiting and resident scholars eat lunch together, so my presence alongside his greatness prompted much whispering. I was meeting with him to discuss art critic Amy Goldin, his former student at Harvard, who had befriended several of the P&D artists. Grabar figured into the P&D narrative directly, because he had supplied introduction letters to Goldin and artist Robert Kushner to visit sites in Iraq and Afghanistan on a trip in the early 1970s. He spoke freely with me about his adventures studying Islamic art, but said, “There are barriers you will experience, even in completing basic research.” “Barriers?,” I asked naively, thinking he meant me being a woman and expecting that he somehow thought I planned to do site research in the Middle Eastern countries. He explained it wouldn’t be a popular notion to discuss the influence of Islamic art on American art now. I left that visit determined to do a great job on my paper and the exhibition. But I had a persistent nagging feeling about my work as potentially unpopular. I began to think more about the reports of surveillance of scholarship by the U.S. government. I began to use Google exclusively since some of the other search engines were giving search data to the intelligence organizations in the government. I offered lectures on the impact of Islamic art on American art but Americans, unlike the Japanese, weren’t biting. It was too early for public lectures. . . . I was doing unpopular work.

Anne Swartz is Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. In her writing, curating, and public lectures she focuses on contemporary art, especially feminist artists. She has supported the innovative and transgressive work of emerging and established artists, whose art has not been fully examined. Swartz is currently co-editing *The Question of the Girl* with Jillian St. Jacques and completing *Female Sexualities in Contemporary Art*, an essay collection, and *The History of New Media/New Genre: From John Cage to Now*, a survey of developments in recent art.