

are given enough explanation to keep a general reader clued in. Discussions of major historic sculptures are balanced with recent artists who revive concepts, like Thabiso Phokompe, who said, “I want to reach there—the *minkisi* state of mind” (p. 66). At times, the seesaw of past and present threatens to become a dizzying succession of quotations, but they are balanced by more thorough analysis of the work of artists like Ledelle Moe, whose 9-foot boulder sculpture is described in exacting detail. The chapter concludes on a note of intense creative force as Wangechi Mutu writes her own synopsis of her history and how she chooses work with the associations that come with blood, saliva, milk, tears, sweat, and urine. Suddenly, the artist’s words ignite a more personal awareness of what the chapter was getting at.

For “Imagining the Underground,” Chapter 3, Melbourne opens with a quotation from Yi-Fu Tuan, who describes “the quest to understand the tension between surface and what lies behind, beneath or beyond it as a ubiquitous dimension of human experience” (p. 117). From this premise, she identifies numerous African visions of underground domains. Animals who are able to provoke these visions are cited—snakes, dogs, mudfish—and are followed by ways that human figures are situated as guardians or oathtakers. Such allegorical roles for humans interacting with the underground disappear in the second half of the chapter as the shift to an era when industrial mining changed relationships forever after. Now humans literally go underground, giving rise to photographs and images of mines and mining in Gabon, South Africa, and Ghana. For this chapter, Clive van den Berg contributes an essay entitled “Breaking Surface” that recounts his personal interest in seeing excavations of the narratives that are missing from battlefields and archives of his home in Zambia.

At this point in the publication, references tilt more toward contemporary art. Chapter 4, “Strategies of the Surface,” considers landscapes in photographs and paintings from a wide range of individual artists. Allan DeSouza writes an artist’s statement about his unique dual identification as a fictional researcher who is one of his alter egos, and channels them both as they wander purposefully together. Throughout this chapter, the landscapes are images ready to be decoded with the assistance of the artist whose words are often quoted in the text. This reliance on a first person directness comes up against a counterpoint of broad cultural identification with a section that looks at landscapes according to Mbuti artists of the Ituri forests, the representational systems of Luba, masks of Baule and memorial posts of Mjikenda.

Chapter 5, “Art as Environmental Action,” follows contemporary artists who step into the conflicts about the misuse of earth’s resources.

Melbourne organizes this by introducing an issue and the artist/artists who deliver haunting images of it. Asbestos is recorded as a blue wasteland in South Africa by David Goldblatt, *The Hell of Copper EWaste* (2008) is seen in Nyaba Leon Ouedraogo’s photographs of Ghana. Extraction and consumption are viewed through paintings by Jerry Buhari and the sculptures of El Anatsui. Aesthetic solutions are offered through the recognition of a Zambian collective that replants trees and the recycling by Younes Rahmoun of Morocco. Vivid illustrations of how we are destroying planet Earth and melting glaciers are brought up on canvases and videos by Ghada Amer and Reza Farkhondeh and Georgia Papageorge. George Osodi’s statement about “matter, eco-ethics and composite space” (p. 235) offers a forceful conclusion.

Chapter 6, “Earth Works,” begins with a brief history lesson about artists who worked directly with the earth in the US and Britain since 1968. Such precedents for monumental works that reformed the landscape are considered, but the different African orientations to landscape lead into a description of the Mbari houses of Owerri Igbo peoples of eastern Nigeria as an alternate sacred art form. The chapter ends with a case-by-case description of artists working in outdoor installations. Photographs of their work offer tempting documents of earth art realized in grand proportions. Several are the final projects that appeared near the museum, including *Land Reform* (2013) by Strijdom van der Merwe, *Hunger* (2013) by Ghada Amer, *Ala* (2013) by El Anatsui, and two project proposals from Rachid Koriachi and Willem Boshoff. It is rare for a book to be able to document an exhibition process that builds to a crescendo of projects dispersed throughout the nation’s capital, and to so many Smithsonian institutions.

Earth Matters presents hundreds of illustrations of art and the environment by over 100 artists from 24 African nations, all placed in a provocative matrix that mixes observation with agitation. This sensibility moves on from this publication into a format that museums and audiences are becoming increasingly reliant upon: the Internet. *Earth Matters’* web site (which is still accessible from the National Museum of African Art’s past exhibition website, <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/earthmatters/>) spreads this inquiry into a forum for collaborative investigation. A blog opens the door for short essays by “guest voices” often composed by Smithsonian experts from many disciplines, and a news feed from a multitude of sources acts as a uniquely focused search engine. Most of the other written elements of the exhibition—family and program guides, artist’s biographies, performance art videos, twitter interviews, lesson plans for teachers, and artists quotes—are made available to international readers for no cost. This manner

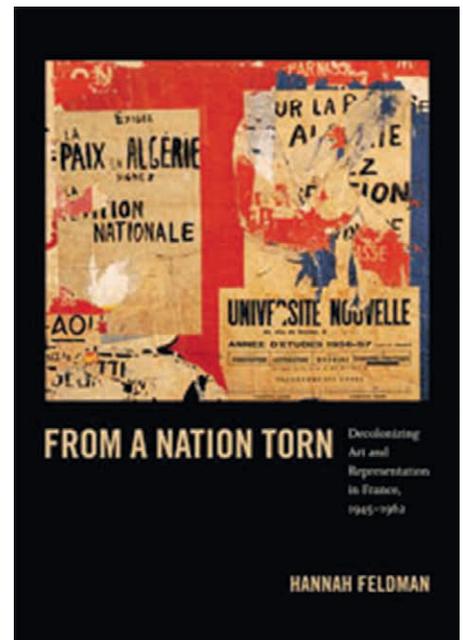
of publishing takes advantage of the immediacy and flexibility of the web, which is a sign of future choices being considered by museums.

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book review



From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945–1962

by Hannah Feldman
Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. 336 pp., 21 color, 63 b/w illus. \$99.95 cloth; \$27.95 paper

reviewed by Michelle Huntingford Craig

Scholars interested in visual culture generally and modernism, colonial resistance, and subaltern art production in particular will benefit greatly from a close reading of *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945–1962*. As scholars take note of the stakes masterfully outlined by Hannah Feldman and bring them out of France and into former colonies, including Algeria, hopefully the nuance and theoretical rigor applied in this book will also find application in future

acts of decolonial looking. It is worth taking stock of the ways we continue to *see* and *not see* in the age of neocolonization and the “War on Terror.”

In the years after World War II, France engaged in wars of independence, first in Indochina (1946–1954) and then in Algeria (1954–1962). Feldman focuses upon the wartime context of art production in France from the 1940s through the 1960s, powerfully recasting French modernism. To open her provocation to decolonize art and representation, she argues that works dating from these decades were produced *during-war*, not *post-war*; the change in temporal attribution attests to the ways in which realities during wars of independence, in addition to the legacy of World War II, infused and rationalized cultural production and spatial practice in France.

Feldman exposes the ways in which artistic practices affected the formation and experience of culture during war. In so doing, she challenges the ways in which certain histories are visualized and others are concealed or forgotten, naturalizing their absence from modernist histories. Feldman’s careful choice of words and keen attention to the invisibility of peoples and spaces denied representation cause us to pause and contemplate the silence surrounding subaltern populations. Indeed, her careful analysis of a range of visual practices allows formerly obscured histories and relationships to come to light, but more importantly for the author, lays bare strategies of obfuscation which contributed to debates about the nation, national belonging, citizenship, and representational democracy.

Grounded in art history but engaging a number of disciplines, this rich and dense work convincingly presents and contests the intersection of theories of political representation and theories of aesthetic representation. The three parts and brief concluding section of *From a Nation Torn* are largely chronological, with each part emphasizing a different representational modality—space, language, and image.

Part I begins with a critique of the decontextualized theory behind André Malraux’s *Les voix du silence* (*The Voices of Silence*, 1951), including his *musée imaginaire* (museum without walls), in what Feldman calls his “amnesiac aesthetics,” before examining how his theories were put in practice during his tenure as Minister of Cultural Affairs (1959–1969). Malraux’s aesthetic model was enacted in France to clean the blackened façades of

historic buildings. The restoration initiative was intended to create universal spaces that could serve as the public face of the Republic and underscored the relationship between access to public space and feelings of national belonging.

Such preservation policies resulted in the removal of French citizens of Algerian heritage from the center of Paris during the restoration of their neighborhood with no guarantee residents could return to their homes. The “whitening” practices in Paris also drew upon urban experiments in the colonies, particularly the dual-city strategy used in Morocco and other territories. The depopulation of the Marais’s Algerian residents also echoed the eviction of Jews by the Vichy regime and, in effect, whitened the demographics of Paris just as the restored façades were also whitened, their appearance rewound to a precolonial era without the imprint of France’s colonial experiments. Many of the displaced residents would resettle in *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns, on the outskirts of Paris, in areas that would become associated with residents of Maghrebi descent in the decades of decolonization. This episode should give scholars of heritage preservation pause, as the tendency to restore buildings to a particular city’s “golden age” is never neutral and continues to marginalize populations.

Part II examines linguistic battlegrounds in the avant-garde practices of Isidore Isou and the *décollages* (subtractive artworks created by tearing pieces away) of Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé, opening up the use of tactics (following Michel de Certeau’s definition of tactic as a counterhegemonic practice of everyday life). Feldman discusses Isou’s intent to de-territorialize language within his Lettrist poems in order to produce a new form of universal language. Isou harnessed his subaltern experiences as a Romanian-born Jew and was able to chisel out a space for his avant-garde practices precisely in the urban areas denied to others.

Hains’s and Villeglé’s *décollages* as well as a photographic series of Hains by Harry Skunk and János Kender contest erasures occurring elsewhere in the city due to manifestations of political divisions exacerbated by the wars of independence in Indochina and Algeria. Feldman connects these works to the *défense d’afficher* legislation the 1881 that regulated the placement of political propaganda in public spaces as well as to the subaltern tactics of graffiti and vandalism.

In the early 1960s, just as residents of Algerian descent were seen less in the center of Paris, the war in Algeria became less visible in the press. The spectral presence of populations and agitators barred from urban space appear protected within the walls of the gallery in Hains’s and Villeglé’s 1961 exhibition “La France déchirée” (France Torn Apart). Feldman persuasively interrogates critiques of the *décollages* that do not move beyond aesthetic or contextual analysis and probes the uncertainty surrounding the audience’s ability to see the objects exhibited. The lacerated posters in the exhibition marked interventions in the public space, illuminating the issues taking place in the streets of Paris and provoking a rethinking and reactivating of those spaces.

The agency of subjects with Algerian heritage becomes apparent in Part III when the FF-FLN (Comité fédéral de la fédération de France du Front de libération nationale) ordered a demonstration against a curfew, whereas it was absent in Malraux’s whitewashing of the Marais (Part I). Examination of the protest of October 17, 1961, the violent police response to the demonstration, and images documenting both, counters the misperception that this event has disappeared from public discourse. The play between being *seen* and remaining *unseen*, recognizing that visibility changes with the particular audience viewing an object or spectacle. Feldman brings her arguments to the current decade in her Coda, where she continues to probe modes of representation, especially in cinema and in response to the riots of October and November 2005.

One of the book’s great strengths, the diversity of materials investigated, also serves as a call for future research. Feldman’s cogent use of philosophy and theory asserts the interconnections of aesthetics and spatial and visual cultures. Photographic documentation, relevant theories and, often, juridical frameworks help to link many of the disparate episodes Feldman investigates. In addition to decolonizing modern art, the book also expands the discourses on colonial and postcolonial architecture and urbanism. Feldman’s consideration of recent events in her Introduction and Coda, clearly reminds readers that the legacies of the practices and experiences investigated in this book continue to impinge upon contemporary realities.

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