

Editorial Introduction

As we move into the winter of 2021, we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and the unique challenges it poses to academia and the disciplines of art history and visual culture studies specifically. Reflecting on the current state of affairs in Guatemala, a student recently asked me what forms of collective action are appropriate for individuals to take during this time of concurrent social unrest and public health crisis. Fortunately, I had queued up a few slides focused on the resurgence of *cacerolazos* (known as *panelaços* in Portuguese) across South America in the last year (fig. 1). From the Spanish *cacerola* or “stew pot,” *cacerolazos* gather in public places banging empty pots and pans with kitchen utensils to express disapproval and protest current social conditions. *Cacerolazo* protests, which began in South America in Chile during the early years of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–90), emerged again in 2020 as individuals across South America sought safe forms of public social expression during a worsening global pandemic. In Brazil, Chile, and across Latin America, individuals have leaned out windows, stood on balconies, and stepped out onto stoops banging pots and pans to protest government corruption, mishandling, and underperformance across all social sectors.

Collective protest actions are essential forms of political expression and public demonstration. However, as an art historian, I also emphasized to the class the importance of cultural expression as an essential mode of socio-political engagement. Citing the contemporary Colombian musician J. Balvin, we discussed how performative and visual culture provide platforms for the public debate of critical social issues impacting contemporary Latin American and Latinx lives. Publications like *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* also provide public platforms for disseminating and debating the issues facing Latin America and the USA today. As Édouard Glissant observed, “all literal literacy needs to be buttressed by

a cultural literacy that opens up possibilities and allows the revival of autonomous creative forces from within, and hence ‘inside,’ the language under consideration.”¹ The scholarship, analysis, and discourse presented in *LALVC* shines a spotlight on the creative potential of the cultural in Latin American and Latinx historical and contemporary lives and societies.

This issue is no exception. The first scholarly article presented here, “‘Like the Flame of Fire’: A New Look at the ‘Hearst’ Chalice” is contributed by curators Ilona Katzew and Rachel Kaplan from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. By focusing their attention on a singular masterwork of colonial-era silver produced in sixteenth-century Mexico yet ironically named for its twentieth-century owner William Randolph Hearst, Katzew and Kaplan argue that the “Hearst” Chalice was created during the violent years of the Spanish conquest as part of abrupt shifts in visual cultural expression motivated by a process they term “mutual accommodation,” which, while subtle in its reflection to the contemporary viewer, was a deeply impactful process of negotiation that drove the establishment of the new colonial society that would come to replace Aztec Mexico. The authors eschew a universal, homogenous reading of the colonial Mexican past in favor of a nuanced approach that allows the reader to find cross-cultural resonance in their purposeful focus on one particular masterpiece. This interdisciplinary, methodologically diverse work highlights how the violence of colonialism is expressed in visual style, materiality, and reception. The mangle of European, Indigenous, and local colonial traditions occurred across space and time, within and around the “Hearst” Chalice.

Nancy Deffebach’s analysis of *la Violencia* in Colombia through the lens of Débora Arango’s art hinges on the

1. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 104.



FIGURE 1. Unidentified artist, *Cacerolaza chilena*, 2020 (photograph in the public domain)

epistemic violence rendered in civil war and its expression in visual culture. It is a coincidence that Deffebach's text is appearing alongside Katzew and Kaplan's essay, but it cannot go without notice that both scholarly inquiries are grounded in questioning the potential for sociopolitical violence to manifest powerful forms of visual expression. Deffebach also focuses our attention on the specific, by centering her analysis on the work of the Colombian artist Arango. Her essay, "The Artist as Witness: Débora Arango's Images of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and the Eruption of *la Violencia* in Colombia," explores how Arango's body of work from the 1930s through the 1950s is indicative of what women overall had access to and how marginalized people were represented during decades of traumatic civil war. According to Deffebach, Arango becomes a witness to Colombia's political crisis known as *la Violencia* (the Violence), in which conservatives and liberals clashed violently in the wake of the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Arango's first five political paintings focused on Gaitán's biography, carving out a role for women as political witnesses with the visual, material, and intellectual tools to provide testimony for the collective during times of political crisis.

Points of view, subjects, and dialogues often mangle together in the pages of *LALVC*, just as they do in the work of the artists, scholars, and public figures whose

work the journal features. I came to the violent epistemological configuration of "the mangle" through my discussions with Charlene Villaseñor Black about her University of California, Los Angeles, colleagues working in the digital humanities as we prepared for this issue. Todd Presner's emphasis on critical theory in the field is fundamentally influenced by Andrew Pickering's formulation of "the mangle of digital humanities," which Presner reads as "a metaphor for understanding scientific practices that are marked by a 'dance of agency' played out through human, material, and social strategies of resistance and accommodation."² Like the *cacerolazos* expressing their discontent nonviolently and socially distant, the academic, artistic, expressive, and activist work presented in *LALVC* is part of a transformative praxis. The practical dimension of projects like this journal have proved indispensable as scholars, students, and activists turn to the digital humanities more than ever amid increasing social unrest and pandemic conditions.

We see this firsthand in the Dialogues, organized and guest-edited by Jennifer Josten from the University of

2. Todd Presner, "Critical Theory and the Mangle of Digital Humanities," in *Between Humanities and the Digital*, ed. Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015): 55–68, especially 56. See also Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 22–23.

Pittsburgh. Josten has brought together curators from across the field and throughout the hemisphere to discuss their approaches to the exhibition of Mexican visual culture in “Displaying Greater Mexico: Border-Crossing Exhibitions, 1990–2020.” This *Dialogues* juxtaposes exhibition practices applied to material from the ancient period to the present day. The artists, curators, scholars, and activists involved in conceptualizing, planning, and presenting this work are consciously “dancing” in the mangle of critical theory. Josten herself points this out when she observes how visual objects and design activate in the interstitial spaces across personal, social, and political boundaries. The “art of exhibiting Mexican art” demonstrates the power of artworks to communicate, build diplomatic relations, and promote historical and cultural literacy.

Collaborative exhibition work focused on US-Mexican cultural relations has been a curatorial praxis for decades, as Josten points out in her discussion of the 1990s exhibitions *Splendors* and *inSITE*. Exhibiting art from greater Mexico in the twenty-first century promises to facilitate cross-border relationships, government and institutional collaborations, and scholarly interventions. The movement of artists, artworks, and ideas has an impact that ripples out across the United States and Mexico. As the contemporary artist Rubén Ortiz-Torres demonstrates in his contribution to the *Dialogues*, popular culture, craft, and tourism participate in the consolidation of US–Latin American contemporary relations, while productively engaging with the legacies of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Clara Bargellini reflects on the 2009 exhibition *The Arts of the Missions of Northern New Spain, 1600–1821*, which she curated with Michael Komaneky. Bargellini’s work in this and other contexts explores the potential for transnational study of the mangled dynamics of cultural exchange that shape relations up and down the social hierarchy. In her piece on *Golden Kingdoms: Luxury and Legacy in the Ancient Americas*,

Kim Richter reflects on her curatorial collaboration with Joanne Pillsbury. Richter argues that museum exhibitions are unassailable vehicles for the investigation of transcultural histories. Xóchitl Flores-Marcial’s curatorial exhibition of contemporary Oaxacan mural painting at the Los Angeles Central Library in 2017 demonstrates that institutional transformation depends upon meaningful community engagement on many concurrent levels. Luis Vargas-Santiago, curator of the 2019–20 pre-COVID-19 blockbuster exhibition *Emiliano: Zapata después de Zapata* (*Zapata after Zapata*), describes curatorial practice as a transformational praxis positioned to function as historiographical intervention, in particular in the context of visual diaspora. Josten and her contributors have used the professional practice to insert themselves into “the mangle,” activating its creative potential and conceptual engagement with a range of issues from image proliferation and social justice to institutional and governmental collaboration.

LALVC not only provides a vital scholarly platform for the field that can spotlight and juxtapose work as diverse as the research presented in this issue; it has established academic legitimacy that readers can rely upon as they navigate “the mangle” during a time in which distrust of the media has undermined the nature of truth across the board. Cultural imaginaries are constantly in flux, shaping who gets to see curated objects/performances in particular spaces dispersed across geographical and temporal landscapes. From scholarly research, professional exhibitions, art installations, and collective actions to publications like this one, reflection on historical epistemic violence must remain at the forefront of our efforts. We look forward to bringing another four issues to you this year. Thank you for your continued support and trust as we continue our collective work within the mangle during times of ongoing uncertainty with stakes of unprecedented scale.