

culturala

DISAPPEARANCE

editorial note

These past few months have been all about letters. Everywhere I've looked, at every show, for every installation: letters flying around and dissolving into a chaos of dark space. Seeing them over and over again left me wondering if it's not a metaphor, a stand in for something else.

Are these letters in chaos speaking of a confusion in logic? Are they speaking of the present confusion? Of our inability to communicate because we use the same words and the same letters to mean different things? Is this just us all standing at the tower of Babylon, speaking different languages?

We keep trying to fit long, beautiful words into equally long, unique metaphors – unless we're typing up that 150 character tweet that works better for shouting slogans than speaking at leisure. Same letters, different meanings.

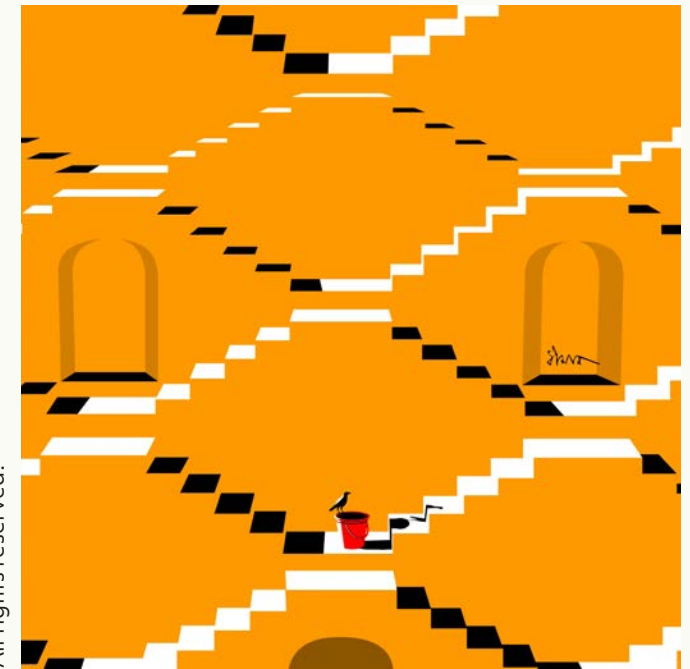
In the contemporary art world, it's not always been about letters specifically, but it's always been about meanings and interpretations of words, concepts, shapes, forms... Sometimes more successfully, sometimes less. The one essay that revolutionised my way of thinking about contemporary art is an art theory piece by Rosalind Krauss called 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (*October*, 1979).

To be honest, it took about three takes before I got what it was about at all (followed by a few phone calls trying to figure out the maths behind the expanded field formula, and a whole lot of research). First then did I – *imagine!* – find myself getting what all these contemporary sculptures and earthworks and installations were about.

Great, of course. Also, sad. Krauss' work was written in 1979. We're in 2021 now. How come we still haven't found any other ways to speak, to write, to say and to make our letters into words that can be translated without the prior theoretical knowledge?

Words that actually connect between people, between artists, between curators, between thinkers, between all of us?

Illustration by Dhiman Gupta.
All rights reserved.



I know contemporary art is a bit of a minefield, but surely we can find one way or other to build some bridges that we can all cross together?

So, with a most wonderful team that has brought so much creativity, joy and belief to my life, I decided to start a journal. We spent hours and hours on end trying to figure out what an art theory journal is and looks like, how it can be, what we actually want. What looks good, and what is good. What makes sense to do? How do you create a journal that one day may be able to act as a bridge.

Or a cornerstone to a bridge.

Okay, maybe just a building block.

Just *something* that can let us play around, explore and experiment. That gives us time and space to try to reconnect the letters from all these places – because in the end, we're speaking in more similar terms than we think.

Reconnect art and life, music and visual art, performance and photography, video and textiles. The whole lot of it. Reconnect people, reconnect forms.

It's a lofty ideal, an open-ended project, and an absolutely banging group of people that I've had the privilege to work with on this. To you all, thank you ever so much. To all of you who are reading this, thank you equally for connecting with us.

With these words, I'd like to welcome you to our first issue: Disappearance. Credit where credit is due – the idea was inspired by Ackbar Abbas' incredible work, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Together with our contributors, we've been grappling with disappearance as a cultural phenomena in a lot of different ways.

On the following pages you'll find many kinds of disappearances: the disappearance of self, the disappearance of time, the disappearance of spaces, and the disappearance that happens when change is so fast that 'the new' disappears in front of our eyes, always replaced with 'the newer'.

Welcome, thank you, and enjoy.
Love,
M

8	time grit. DANIEL MATTHEWS
12	a tale about a bird. MARIA KRUGLYAK
14	pass. DIANA LIZETTE RODRIGUEZ
16	where did all the womxn artists come from? ELSPETH WALKER
20	disappearance and memory erosion in The Memory Police by Yoko Ogawa ALEJANDRA ESPINOSA
22	Jasper Jones: a seductive act of resistance DAISY CORBIN O'GRADY
25	PHOTOGRAPHY // BY // JASPER JONES
32	psychodrama of a fragmented self ANGELIKI VIDOU
38	turning tables and turning identity: thoughts on artistic self in the shifting EDM economy MATTHIAS LONDON
44	ghosts & magical thinking in the present day SILJA VORNANEN
50	desert of the hyperreal: Gulf futurism's prophetic image SARAH SCOTT
58	an expanded space of disappearance: where the disappeared appears MARIA KRUGLYAK
66	PHOTOGRAPHY // BY // ANNA CHEREDNIKOVA sometimes things disappear DANIEL MATTHEWS

an expanded space of disappearance

where the disappeared appears

BY MARIA KRUGLYAK

In Japanese 15th century art, *showing* that something isn't there is a way to show that it's important – say Mt Fuji or the Emperor would always be disguised by mist. In contemporary art and culture, the absence or disappearance of things is more complex. It takes on a range of meanings and forms.

Since the 1980s/1990s, theorists of postmodernity, cosmopolitanism and globalism have found disappearance everywhere. Cosmopolitanism became a *thing*, everyone was writing about it, working with it. Defined as a unity or combination of cultures, cosmopolitanism entered our vocabulary as a contrast to nationalism, patriotism and rural life: the uprootedness of city life and migration, the embodiment of globalism. A cosmopolitan is at once at home everywhere and nowhere. Invisible and visible at the same time; a shapeshifter just as the buildings, cars and data that fly by and change form before their eyes.

Disappearance found its place in discourse in connection to the cosmopolitan, mostly in close dialogue with identity, roots and grounding. Then came the scholar who made disappearance into a state of culture, a cultural phenomena so to say, Ackbar Abbas.

Abbas saw disappearance in the culture of post-1997 Hong Kong, when China and the UK had shaken hands over the future of this cosmopolitan city of all cities. Apart from being a defining event in world history, something unusual happened here that made Abbas say that disappearance is a state of HK culture. Something unprecedented. The thing is, this agreement came with a 'timer': 'one country, two systems' for 50 years, and then Hong Kong officially becomes Chinese.

Today, that timer seems to have gone off prematurely as mass arrests and persecution haunt the city with horror story after horror story. But even in the late 1990s, the 50-year-timeline aspect of the agreement created anger and confusion. In culture and art, it took the form of a fast-paced frenzy eroding traditional, modern and contemporary culture all in one go. What happens to a place that has to change fast enough to stay as a financial and cultural centre for x number of years? What happens when a city needs to

reach its sky limit in a set period of time? What would you act like if you were given a space to rearrange and create in as you wish but only for two years before it's brutally taken away from you and remodelled after someone else's ideas? Would you scramble to make the most of it, abandoning one half-finished project for the new shiny idea, again and again?

Imagine, it's a city. A city placed in this precarious position after a complex history of colonialism, capitalism and revolt. A city having their status quo on an official timer, a status quo about to *disappear*. The 'about to' is the clue, the password, to understanding disappearance, and this is where Abbas comes in. Abbas saw Hong Kong as being in a continuous state of disappearance where change itself is accelerated, sped up until everything becomes almost invisible. In the way that a motorcycle speeding on the road in front of your eyes seems to be blurred, disappearing in your vision. This rushing around characteristic of any city increased by the common knowledge of a 50-year-timer has a curious effect. It creates mirages, ghosts, and a fertile ground for artistic explorations of time and change.

Naturally, it also fosters art that speaks of these very mirages and erosions of the present and this lack: lack of stability, lack of knowing, lack of a set future, lack of a foundation, lack of a continuation.

It sounds quite familiar, don't you think? Everyone scrambling for the next kick, every street having a new shop opening up and an old one closing down, a new development here and some refurbishment works there... Things changing, shifting, faster and faster as we consume information at an ever-increasing speed. From the late 1990s and into 2021, each year has brought about faster and faster changes,



View of buildings Hong Kong side.



View of buildings Hong Kong side.

accelerating into the state of... disappearance.

It seems to be a logical end point of human nature and of cities – especially megacities. As we move into the 2020s, this state of a continuous disappearance and uncertainty for the future seems to have travelled across the globe to various places, taking various forms.

I started following this idea by taking Abbas' framework of disappearance to the arts elsewhere, because it just seemed so familiar to me: isn't the skyline of New York in a constant state of disappearance, while New Yorkers are forced to move further and further away from the city centre? Isn't the financial centre of São Paulo experiencing the same as the gap between the city and its inhabitants grows wider and wider? The pandemic may have temporarily frozen this phenomena, but if I'm right, then this freeze would be of an overexposed image, half-there, half-not. Is that not just a snapshot of London, I thought, half-invisible, almost nonexistent and definitely surreal, frozen amidst changes?

Turns out, this wasn't quite the case. I gathered data, searched biennales, exhibitions, private collections and digital works, looking for the disappeared...and found something else: the disappeared being framed, outlined, appearing.

Let's take a step back here. Abbas found the disappearance, felt the disappearance, of Hong Kong and saw it reflected, duplicated through various schisms: in the architecture, urban development, films and art of HK culture. Since then, he's taken his – revolutionary – theory into the paradigm of other arts and (sometimes) exported a variant of it such as at a talk at Moscow biennale in 2015. I've heard others say about Hong Kong that it has this quality of not quite being present, so there's no doubt he struck gold here. This state of disappearance is very much real and felt elsewhere too, in Johannesburg, in São Paulo, in Santiago de Chile and in Bangkok, to varying degrees and with

varying effects.

However, its reflection in art shows not so much, I'd argue, a sense of being unable to connect

with that which was (as, for example, HK films portraying a ghost of a lover from a past that cannot be returned and has nowhere to come back to – I'm talking about *Rouge*, 1988, dir. Stanley Kwan, that Abbas refers to) but a making appear that which has disappeared. That which has been made invisible by history, by society, by inequality.

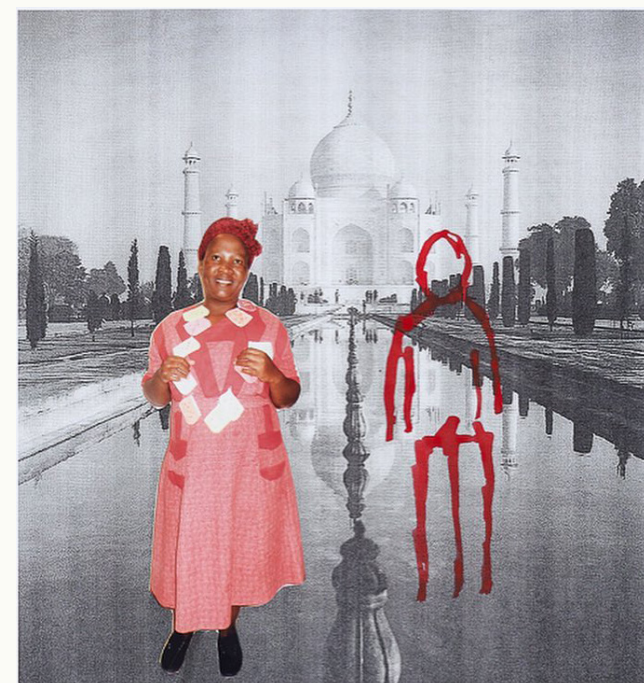


From *Until You Change* by Paola Paredes (2017).
Courtesy of the artist.

A ghost from a past that comes back is also a way to make disappearance appear, but it's an appearance that is intangible, unreal. What we see now instead goes one step further: forgotten or hidden histories or realities that have been lost in time appearing as something real and tangible that artists can shine a light on. It's Paola Paredes' (Ecuador) *Until You Change* – a 2017 photo series that sheds light on hidden and censored correctional facilities for LGBTQ+ Ecuadorians. These are places where no cameras are allowed. So the artist instead replicates scenarios from first-hand accounts, portraying the victim by taking on the role in front of the camera herself. Paredes makes the otherwise anonymous victims reappear in full view and with all rights to their life. Instead of disappearing, which these facilities make people do, the art brings the oppressed back into appearance.

Here we also find Senzeni Marasela's exhibition at Zeitz MOCAA, *Waiting for Gebane*

(2017-2019; exhibited 2020-2021). This exhibition has a row of hangers of pink-red dresses that the artist wore over six years, re-enacting the lives of married women in South Africa. There's also another row of empty hangers showing the dresses that never got to be worn – dresses that in their framed absence are made to appear. Then, amongst it all, mixed media collages of photographs of women with outlines of other women drawn onto the photo in the deep red of womanhood: the only visibility of these other women are their red outline. Just as in HK cinema, these 'others' are ghosts, but they're not brought in by the artist to serve as a substitute for a distance to that which we cannot see, but to be brought to life, to reality, to action. They don't go through walls as ghosts, their contours are clearly defined. They fill the space actively taking part in their new-found life of appearing.



From *Waiting for Gebane* by Senzeni Marasela (2017-19). Courtesy of the artist.

Turning to the two young photographers featured in this issue, we have Jasper Jones (UK) framing the invisible, covered face of the artist himself and Anna Cherednikova (Sweden/Russia) whose photographs shed a light on the unseen, unwanted, 'wanted to disappear' weeds. In more conceptual works, we find a continuing booming trend of the 'found object' and the use of recycled materials: art created out of that which previously had been made to disappear

into the vast waste of our global lives. That which is lost is, through art, made to take space. To take action. To become visible.

Yes, the world of megacities does inhabit a space of disappearance. Perhaps artists are responding to this state of disappearance, this acceleration, by slowing down the process. Perhaps artists are asking their audience to stop and reconsider. Artists begging us to visualise that which cannot be seen. Inviting us to partake in making appear that which has or is about to disappear.

If you think about it, it would seem that this is a natural progression from the 1990s: from discovering and reflecting on the disappearance, to taking action to make that which is not appear.



Who's been working on this?

Illustrations & visual dir. by Laureen Lehoux visual director of culturala, Laureen is an artist and illustrator. You can find her works on laureenlhx.wixsite.com/webside.

Graphic design by Maria Kruglyak with advice & support from Joe Villion, Lera Burmistrova, Philip Hogg and the rest of the culturala community.

Production by Lauren Máiréad Wells

Editing by Sarah Scott

Animation for the crowdfunding campaign by Alessio Cazzola – get in touch with him on [@planetdookie](https://www.instagram.com/planetdookie)

Music for crowdfunding campaign & instagram posts etc. by **Mikey Sibson**, check out his work on 45turns.com & [soundcloud.com/inthelift](https://www.soundcloud.com/inthelift)

The contributors, in order of appearance:

Dhiman Gupta is an amazing illustrator who makes his living by combining artistic and marketing skills. If you want to illustrate your campaign with a graphic series for example. Reach Dhiman on [@thedhimangupta](https://www.instagram.com/thedhimangupta).

Daniel Matthews is a writer, journalist and co-founder of The Hamburg Design Review thehamburgdesignreview.squarespace.com. Here you can find his music, writing, podcasts... everything political satire, and it's so worth having a look.

Maria Kruglyak is an art theory researcher, writer and cultural journalist. She's working as an intern at MAAT at the moment, and is also the editor-in-chief here at culturala.

Diana Lizette Rodriguez is a poet and artist, and she's just co-founded a publishing house Sour Patch Press [@pressourpatch](https://www.instagram.com/pressourpatch)

Elsbeth Walker is writer on all things art theory. She runs the Compression Arts collective, is a trustee for The Photographers Gallery and doing an MA in writing at the Royal College of Art.

Simona Patrizi contributed the illustrations for Elspeth's piece with an incredible Donna Forma series. You can buy illustrations, goodies and paintings on simonapatrizi.shopify.com

Alejandra Espinosa is a writer in all things art history. Find more from her on alejandraespinosa.site

Bianca Wallis-Salmon is a photographer genius. You'll find her works with Alejandra's essay, as well as on her website hellobiancafoto.co.uk

Daisy Corbin O'Grady is a writer, reader and lover of stories and dogs. Based in Amsterdam, she works for World Press Photo.

Jasper Jones is the featured artist of this issue. He is a photographer, film maker and curator, and you can find his works on jasper-jones.com

Angeliki Vidou is a law graduated that's currently studying psychoanalysis at the New Lacanian School in Athens (AKSPA).

Matthias London is a writer and lover of electronic music, living and storytelling. He's publishing for WeRaveYou and is currently found around the globe doing an MA in Global Studies. Reach him on nodlon-solutions.com.

Silja Vornanen is a writer and editor, she works primarily freelance and can be reached on her instagram [@siljavorona](https://www.instagram.com/siljavorona).

Sarah Scott is a writer, contemporary art theory researcher and editor here at culturala. She currently works in communications at White Cube Gallery.

Anna Cherednikova is an artist working with photography and installation. She's often doing residencies and exhibitions worldwide – catch her on annacherednikova.com.

As well as the artists **Sophia Al Maria, Monira Al Qadiri, Paola Paredes, Senzeni Marasela**

culturala

is an art theory journal published quarterly – sometimes in digital form and sometimes printed. It's also a digital platform, featuring bi-weekly newsletters, workshops, conversations with artists, panel discussions and digital exhibitions.

The aim of culturala is to find a different way to speak about contemporary art. As a network-based platform, we want to open up the art world and make new art accessible. We want an art world that everyone can be a part of.

We're welcoming submissions and texts from younger writers, and older writers. If you can speak theoretically about young, new art, then you're already somewhere. Especially if you can do so in a way that we can all understand!

Culturala would have been impossible if it wasn't for the incredible help and support from our network, and for all the backers of our crowdfunding campaign.

A big THANK YOU for your support to

Kahoo Kan
Alessio Cazzola
Thomas Sheehan
Mark Forrester
Elliot Nash
Silja Vornanen
Isabella Roberts
Clara Gambaro
Hendrik Teltau
Malén Gall

Gloria Yu
NURTURE Magazine
Andrew Brown
Charles de Cabarrus
Gillian McIver
Elliot Nash
Simona Patrizi
Aliya Webb
Jodi Lynn McCoy
Kim Fox
Anita Corbin

Liz Kwan
Vito Grigorov
Henry Ward
Phyllis Nora Nöster
Aggie Jurochnik
Ingela Dellby
Ilya Kruglyak
Jenni Jostock
Andrey Kruglyak
Lillie Morris
Akane Kawahara
Tanya Vulfson
Brittany Ashley
Roger Preece
Tatum Wells

& anonymous supporters, artistic advisors, community partners
with a special thanks also to ArtCurious, Artpop Talk, Tuesday, Imogen Allen,
Fungai Marima, Bianca Wallis-Salmon & Harriet Gillett

