

*Art-Rite* magazine cover

## Art-Rite

Primary Information's commitment 'to publish out-of-print books that remain vital to ongoing conversations around artistic practice' is continued with the anthology reprint of the magazine *Art-Rite*, 1973-78, described by the writer Ted Castle in *Art Monthly* in 1976 as a 'funky "So-Ho" magazine'. Across an erratically published 21 issues, the magazine mapped, critiqued and contributed to the downtown New York art scene, documenting the spaces and people that intersected with the art world in its many shifting and nascent forms - its formation extended from the utopian thinking that surrounded the dematerialisation of art in the previous decade through to an era that was fully aware of the absorption of such ideas into an increasingly commercialised system of mutual validation between gallery and art magazine. Lesser known than contemporaries such as *Aspen* and *Avalanche* - magazines often evoked for their conceptualisation of the mechanics and materialities of publishing as a post-1960s object - *Art-Rite* in its original form instead utilised the disposable qualities of newsprint, an iconoclastic gesture against the canon of high production values that commented equally on the inherent disposability of arts journalism. Yet despite the magazine's commitment to disposability, *Art-Rite* somehow managed to craft each issue with artist-produced covers: Dorothea Rockburne's hand-folded design intersected the cover across the diagonal for issue 6, while issue 8, designed by Pat Steir, included potato-printed decoration in bright primary colours that were originally hand-stamped by the editors. Both of these notable examples have been translated similarly into this publication.

Negotiating the balance between the historicising implication made present by the activity of re-publishing without intrinsically affecting the temporality of the originals, this reprint opts for the stripped-back simplicity of the facsimile, with each issue divided by a single black page insert, printed on uncoated textured stock that mimics the ink absorption of the aforementioned newsprint, but without the mess of transference



*Art-Rite* magazine spread

commonly equated with the reading of tabloids. As a metaphorical framing for this encounter, as with any re-presented materials in this age where PDF scans and digital cleaning supplement physical intimacy with original materials, facsimile reproductions redirect focus away from witnessing the effects of degradation on now historical examples to enable a quality of reading rarely afforded or even desired with such ephemera.

It is not possible to discuss reading as an activity expressed through an engagement with supposed dematerialised practices without evoking Roland Barthes' 'death' of authorship, and the effects this had on art criticism as a post-1960s subject. *Art-Rite's* editorial team, comprising Edit deAk, Walter Robinson and Joshua Cohn, all Columbia graduates and former students of Brian O'Doherty, assimilated Barthes' proposition not to formally disassociate from subjective relations but instead to attract unestablished writers and artists with an editorial policy of 'coverage of the uncovered'.

Many articles contributed by the editors were uncredited and, in the early editions, the masthead made no distinction between writer and artist, which, along with the use of pseudonyms, destabilised the notion of hierarchical voices within the magazine itself. Such assimilations, whereby the magazine operated as an entity and site of social production, enabled a level of interaction that combined criticism, personal histories and experimentation. The combination of this approach with the magazine's very specific local focus, described by the editors as 'parochial', renders a quality to the material now as historical documentation of artists largely ignored by the mainstream, such as Yvonne Rainer, Vito Acconci, Laurie Anderson, Adrian Piper - now acknowledged as significant in their fields of dance, performance, sound and Conceptual Art.

Viewed now, interactions between artists and the magazine (which frequently used the poll format to quiz artists, using questions such as 'What is it that distinguishes your video from that of other artists working in the medium?') collectivised groups of often partial opinions instead of presenting a singular critical judgement. Responses collide and jostle on the page with intersecting images: a snapshot portrait of a grinning Hannah Wilke, looking directly towards the reader, next to an installation image of a sculpture made by Alan Suicide (aka Alan Vega, from the group Suicide). From these circumstances, therefore, *Art-Rite* was one of the few magazines to present analysis and criticism of this scene in process. The early issues contended particularly with criticism, with contributors including John Perrault, Hilton Kramer and Lawrence Alloway (for a feature titled 'The Critics'

that outlined biographical details of well-known writers, such as Max Kosloff, Robert Pincus-Witten and Lucy Lippard as a way of personalising them); later issues frequently coalesced around themes such as video, performance, artists' books and painting. Extending from these thematic editions, which included artworks inserted as pages within the magazine, several issues consisted solely of artists' commissions, including the text work *Surroundings* by Rosemary Mayer for issue 15, 1977, a visual collaboration with Image Bank for issue 18, 1977, and the libretto *Pearl Girl* by the artist Demi for issue 20, 1978.

This combination of material highlights the significance of *Art-Rite* as an autoethnographic document, emerging from an era of assemblage magazines and solo imprints that stretched the capabilities of the print technologies such as the mimeograph as an innovation for home/studio production, but lacked commentary or distribution. Instead, *Art-Rite's* print and circulation model was substantially different, with runs that started at 1,000 rising to 8,000, and was free at the point of distribution (revenue was produced via subscription). By 1976 the editors commented that 'artists still do the covers, but they've stopped writing about critics, practically stopped writing criticism' – perhaps a response to the changing environment the magazine found itself in, as its influence inevitably pushed it towards mainstream acceptance, as much as to the individual success of the artists that it had previously featured.

Just as *Art-Rite* circumvented the traditional structures of art criticism to represent the artists and spaces the editors saw as marginalised by the discourse around art at that particular moment in time, Primary Information's re-publication revives the relevancy of this approach for this era as artists, curators and researchers attempt to redefine aspects of the recent past that account for more inclusive narratives. Enabling access outside special collections and archives certainly assists with this project, further connecting the magazine to new audiences.

*Art-Rite*, eds Joshua Cohn, Edit DeAk and Walter Robinson, Primary Information and Printed Matter Inc., 2019, 678pp, pb, £32, 978 0 991558 57 5.

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## Klara Kemp-Welch: Networking the Bloc – Experimental Art in Eastern Europe 1965–1981



Fifty years ago some of us waited expectantly every day for the post to come clattering through the letterbox – not for letters as such, but small enveloped works of art on paper or card, some graphically alluring, others masquerading as official missives from fictitious institutions, as dour as the Conceptual Art then fash-

ionable. A significant number came from places like Bratislava, Brno and Budapest in the Eastern Bloc, when otherwise the idea of one-to-one communication with artists in such locations seemed difficult or impossible – and these artists' prime motivation was to find a way to bypass and decentralise the official state cultural apparatus, and to achieve the unmediated distribution of their ideas. For the censors employed by the various Eastern Bloc postal services, these often playfully obtuse mailed items appeared meaningless and were usually ignored. This was an international, two-way traffic, but it was not homogeneous in nature. An artist's communication from Lima, say, was not the same as one from Poznan. Laszlo Beke has characterised what he calls the 'East European variant' of conceptual and mail art as 'flexible and elastic, ironic, humorous and ambiguous, nonprofessional, always ready to become a social activity'. Beke is spot on, as this book shows.

Klara Kemp-Welch's valuable study examines what lay behind this 'creative initiative' across the Eastern Bloc during the period of 'the late Cold War' from the mid 1960s. The 'centre of gravity' of her book topographically is 'East Central Europe' (predominantly Poland, former Czechoslovakia and Hungary). She has uncovered a mass of teeming activity, miraculously preserved in archives, and in the memories of those she interviewed for this book. She describes how the pioneering live art of the Czech artist Milan Knizak and the Slovak artist Alex Mlynarcik, and the international connections they fostered, benefited from an unusual kind of symbiotic alliance between the young artists and the more senior supportive European art critics Pierre Restany and Jindrich Chaloupecky. The latter introduced Knizak to the international Fluxus artists, and Kemp-Welch logs the rather fractious incursions of Fluxus into the Eastern Bloc at this time.

The 1971 project of the Polish artists Jaroslaw Kozlowski and Andrzej Kostolowski, succinctly called NET, seemed to represent the apogee of the increasing networking activity: a pre-digital, utterly analogue, slow-travelling resource of international contact information made to look like a letter from an officially supported organisation. NET announced its arrival via a concise manifesto laboriously typewritten with a rickety manual typewriter on a modest single sheet of airmail-weight paper, its name printed by hand in violet ink from a handmade rubber stamp. The communiqué, Kozlowski has subsequently said, was sent to 'artists who were not interested in careers, commercial success, popularity or recognition'.

The book corrects any abiding tendency to accord a false homogeneity to the status of unofficial artists in the Eastern Bloc at this time. Varying degrees of isolation and repression were experienced by different artists in different countries. One of the most important outcomes of this study is to show that communications and meetings between artists across the Eastern Bloc countries were as infrequent and difficult as exchanges between East and West.

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