

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN ART AND VISUAL STUDIES



CONTEMPORARY
CITIZENSHIP,
ART, AND VISUAL CULTURE

MAKING AND BEING MADE

EDITED BY
COREY DZENKO AND THERESA AVILA



Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture

Taking citizenship as a political position, cultural process, and intertwining of both, this edited volume examines the role of visual art and visual culture as sites for the construction and contestation of both state-sanctioned and cultural citizenships from the 1970s to today. Contributors to this book examine an assortment of visual media—painting, sculpture, photography, performance, the built environment, new media, and social practice—within diverse and international communities, such as the United States, South Africa, Turkey, and New Zealand. Topics addressed include, but are not limited to, citizenship in terms of nation building, civic practices, border zones, transnationalism, statelessness, and affects of belonging as well as alternate forms of, or resistance to, citizenship.

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Cover Image: Franco Vaccari, *Exhibition in Real Time*, 1973, artist book (detail). Image courtesy of the artist.

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Contents

<i>Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
<i>Contributors</i>	xiii
1 Contemporary Citizenship, Art, and Visual Culture: An Introduction	1
COREY DZENKO AND THERESA AVILA	
2 A Bid for Direct Representation: Creative Participation in Franco Vaccari's <i>Photomatic d'Italia</i>	10
MARTINA TANGA	
3 Chinese in America: Flo Oy Wong, Suturing Gaps in the Weave	27
MELANIE ANNE HERZOG	
4 Rethinking Nationalist, Ethno-racist, and Gendered Myths: An Art Historical Take on Minoritarian Variations From Turkey	43
ESER SELEN	
5 Potentials of Exchange, Fellowship, and Love: Contemporary Art, Citizenship, and Performance in South Africa	60
RAÉL JERO SALLEY	
6 Toward an Artistic Insurgency in India: Post-national Impulses in Contemporary Art	76
JOHN XAVIERS	
7 The Visibility of Media Citizenship and the Invisibility of Statelessness: Mikhail Sebastian's Samoan Vacation	94
EMILY KOFOED	
8 This Is Your America: Racially Motivated Violence and Vincent Valdez's <i>The Strangest Fruit</i>	108
ANDREA LEPAGE	

viii *Contents*

9 Temporary Use in Christchurch: Exploring the Links Between Volunteering and Citizenship	127
SALLY CARLTON AND SUZANNE VALLANCE	
10 Activism and Citizenship: Performing Memory and Acts of Memorialization in Austria	145
KAREN FROSTIG	
11 Sounding Citizenship in Canada: An Ongoing Discussion on Art, Affect, and Belonging	158
GABRIELLE MOSER AND BAMBITCHELL (SHARLENE BAMBOAT AND ALEXIS MITCHELL)	
12 Radical Listening: Art and Citizenship in the Public Square—An Interview	168
SHERYL ORING WITH COREY DZENKO	
<i>Index</i>	179
Plates	

Likewise, Salim's practice contains an implicit impulse of activism. Salim is an artist in India who is primarily known for his performances and for making political commentary in the forms of posters. He has also been instrumental as a part of the organizing team of the proposed 2017 Srinagar Biennale.¹⁸ Salim left a life as a teller in a nationalized commercial bank so that he could participate in Delhi's alternative art circle full time. He is a foremost critic of the high-handedness of the state to deal with issues of insurgency. Originally from the Kashmir Valley, Salim migrated to Delhi after Kashmiri *pandits*, or Brahmins, were evacuated from the Srinagar Valley following the first *intifada* in Kashmir.

In the performance titled *I am Dr. Binayak Sen*, Salim designed a small cubical cage that could be fitted onto his head (Plate 6.2). He imprisoned his head and threw away the key. Then he held a charcoal twig between his teeth and wrote, "I am Binayak Sen" on a canvas while wearing the costume of a jailed inmate. In a way, both Joag and Salim identify themselves with Sen—through acts of performative mimesis in Joag's case and through hand-written script in the case of Salim.

Salim is equally vocal in expressing his disapproval of the AFSPA. He has participated in the mobilization for Kashmiri *azaadi* in Delhi, and he has animated the public through his artistic gestures. In one performance he struck a pose of a protestor throwing a stone. The crowd applauded within one second of him freezing in his pose. In another performance as a part of *Out of Focus: In the Shadow of AFSPA*, an evening of stories, poetry, music and discussion organized by Human Rights Law Network at Indian Social Institute main auditorium on August 3, 2013, Salim lay nude as a Pieta-like corpse with an LED sign tied to his body. The LED sign scrolled in red text, "AFSPA u kill." While performing as a corpse, Salim rested his head on the lap of a co-performer, who read out the names of the people who disappeared or died because of AFSPA in Kashmir as well as North East India. At the end of the performance, a few members of the audience carried Inder's nude body with the LED sign off the proscenium stage.

Salim lives on with an ambivalent relationship with Kashmir. He is a Kashmiri *pandit* who had to flee the Kashmir Valley because of Islamic extremism and *intifada*. He also speaks in favor of the Muslims in the valley, who have been harassed by the nation-state. Even so, he is the poster boy of Kashmiri issues in contemporary Indian art. Primarily through performance art Salim has been informing the art nation about the problems in Kashmir, even naming himself the composite Hindu-Muslim name "Inder Salim"; he was originally Inder Tickoo. This double entendre is made visible through a 2007 photographic performative poster of him appearing as a Muslim and a Hindu. The name "Inder Salim" appears written with a material that intentionally looks like human excreta, a material that Salim has used in other of his artworks. Salim has been relentlessly critical of state insensitivity by conducting additional performances in Kashmir and other parts of India about the AFSPA. In particular, he has protested the illegal confinement of Maoists activists in Indian jails, which he addressed in his earlier performance *I am Dr. Binayak Sen*.

In addition to the many enactments of "post-national artistic citizenship" that I discussed above, I want to address how "post-national artistic citizenship" is reflected in the work of the younger artist Baptist Coelho (b. 1977), such as in his *You Can't Afford to Have Emotions Out There* (2009). Coelho held an exhibition based on his stay in Siachen Glacier, a strategic location that India and Pakistan share at the end

of the LoC in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Coelho spent time at the glacier with soldiers and came back with objects, images, and memories of the difficulties the soldiers face in their everyday lives out there, where the temperature dips to –50 degrees Celsius. The mundane existence of soldiers in the inhumane living conditions revealed the meaninglessness of national borders. Coelho’s sympathetic artistic gaze renders the soldiers as workers, who are constantly waging a war, not against a human enemy, but against climatic conditions. Soldiers read the newspapers again and again in order to keep themselves sane. They tried to learn phone numbers in random newspaper advertisements by heart. They also counted the days and reminded each other of each other’s names. In such cold conditions one often ends up delirious, seeing ghostly figures. People multiplied optically in front of the soldiers’ eyes, so they used a password system to make sure that the person in front of them was not an enemy. Some soldiers lost their fingertips due to frostbite, but they do not regret such a loss, because it was for the nation.

Coelho collected discarded uniforms, torn parachutes, rusted jerry cans, and other discarded objects as residue of the extreme national cause. In the installation titled *Out There Nothing Really Survives . . .* (2009), he displayed a cold-storage unit with sneeze guard that contained discarded objects like trekking boots, gloves, and many other found objects from Siachen Glacier. This was a part of his solo exhibit *Between Here and There* (2009), which he showed in the private art gallery Project 88 in Bombay. In another installation in the show, the hollow winter uniform of a soldier hung from the ceiling like a puppet. And in his video *Beneath it all . . . I am Human* (2009), the artist used stop motion animation to remove different layers of the winter army uniform he wore until he was completely nude, pointing to the inhumane conditions in which the army men serve the imagined nation. This is a case of a Bombay-based artist’s adventures into the remote edges of the nation-state, where upon return, the artist makes the folly of the nation-state bare to the viewer. His art counters the Hindu right-wing projection of the soldier as the symbol of “nationalism” and as against the artists, intellectuals, and university students who are branded as “anti-nationals” for critiquing the war on people and the AFSPA.

In February of 2016 Delhi Police arrested a student leader of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) called Kanhaiya on charges of sedition. It was alleged by the police, as per a complaint given by a Hindu students’ organization, that Kanhaiya, among others, raised anti-national slogans on the occasion of marking the death sentence of Kashmiri *azaadi* activist Afzal Guru.¹⁹ Following the arrest of Kanhaiya, intense media trials by national television channels branded the students and teachers of the university as anti-nationals. Prominent intellectuals from all over the world, including Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler, Orhan Pamuk, and others, criticized JNU’s administration for allowing police action against students. Many supporters of free speech and dissent came out in support of JNU’s students and teachers with the trending hashtag #standwithjnu. The controversy, or “JNU row,” as the national media referred to it, sparked off very lively arguments about nationalism. Major international media houses, including the *New York Times* and *Le Monde*, wrote editorials criticizing the Hindu right wing dominated BJP government of India and their vindictive attitude toward university students, their intolerance toward dissent, and their belligerence toward freedom of speech (Bouissou 2016; The Editorial Board 2016). After his release on bail, Kanhaiya delivered a fiery speech in JNU campus’ *azaadi chowk*, or “freedom square.” In his speech, which was televised live during