

- 1 Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, London, 2018, pp. 147–187.
- 2 T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*, Berlin, 2016.
- 3 Sugata Ray, *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550–1850*, Seattle, 2019.

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**Aaron Cezar and Dani Burrows (eds), *Politics of Food*, exh. cat., Delfina Foundation and Sternberg Press, London and Berlin, 2019, 240 pages, paperback, ISBN-13 9783956795169, £20.00.**

*Rosalind Hayes*

Resulting from a curatorial strand pursued by Delfina Foundation since 2013, *Politics of Food* sets a precedent for thinking about ‘the ways in which the arts confront food-related issues’.<sup>1</sup> This book represents a condensed version of the many artist residencies and events held in London during that eponymous programming stream. Artists, anthropologists, farmers and chefs alike present aspects of their work, resulting in a wide-ranging collection of short and occasionally pithy texts. Topics explored include food sovereignty, social inequalities of food and ecological crisis. The dual meaning of ‘cultural’ is the core tension that holds these disparate documents together, in which culinary traditions are mobilised

by arts practitioners to varied ends. For art historians, this beautifully illustrated and avowedly interdisciplinary book is a point of departure for thinking about archives, social engagement and patronage.

The editors, Aaron Cezar and Dani Burrows of Delfina, divided the book into four themed sections: journeys, futures, identity and hospitality. Each section opens with either an academic essay or an ‘in conversation’ transcript, followed by a series of short artist descriptions and reproductions of their work. The breadth of interests and artistic media is wide, which is both a strength and a weakness, for, while there is enough in each entry to introduce readers to key issues – around class or ecology, for example – the texts are often too brief or descriptive to offer conclusions. At some points argumentation, and at others documentation, the divergent approaches between contributors requires readers to constantly shift analytical registers between art objects and scholarly texts.

Key among the artistic strategies represented is the use of historic material to form social platforms for public engagement. This is particularly evident in the first section, which reveals how trade routes, colonialism and migration continue to shape communities through food production. At the nexus of these concerns sit the notions of food sovereignty and heritage, which shape three separate projects through the repatriation of extinct local seed variations to conservationists in Norway, Palestine and Ireland. Each recovers the international journeys taken by native seeds, their repression by monocultural agriculture and eventual introduction to the archive catalogue. Expanding the archive to encompass natural matter, artists and conservationists Amy Franceschini, Vivien Sansour and Christine

Mackey offer an oblique view of human relationships with cultivated land.

Attention to land usage is also central to the following chapter on futures of food production, with studies ranging from Greek farming collectives, agroecology movements in Mexico and South India, to NASA's 1970s plans for cosmic farming. Flitting between geographies and historical periods, not to mention representing both concrete and speculative plans, this is the least cohesive of the chapters in terms of scope.

The next section is much clearer in its focus on how food and eating are an evocative means of exploring and sharing aspects of one's identity. Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz discusses his project *Enemy Kitchen* (2003–ongoing), which began, just before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as cooking workshops teaching Iraqi recipes to New York high school children. It later became a food truck providing meals made by Iraqi refugees, with US veterans as *sous-chefs* and servers. Pointing out that many Iraqi restaurants chose to identify themselves as 'Mediterranean' at this time in the US, Rakowitz foregrounded the cultural connections of his project. Ingredients became artistic materials and chefs sculptors, whose handmade creations formed a different picture of the 'enemy'; not fighting but feeding.

The book's final section concentrates on hospitality, which provokes consideration about who is cooking for whom. As 'Family Meals' are a weekly staple of Delfina's residency programme, it follows that particular projects explore how hospitality is associated with patronage. In 'A Dinner as an Aesthetic and Agro-political Excursion', Fernando García-Dory prepared and served food as a performance for invited curators and collectors, one of many similar events

held at Delfina by residents. Suggesting that the relational quality of commensality be exchanged for patronage of community programmes, García-Dory's text reveals one of the binds of socially-engaged artistic practices; in lieu of structural change, arts institutions are in danger of upholding inequality through the very performative practices they stage.

In framing the historical and conceptual dimensions of how social inequalities manifest in food production and consumption, the scholarly articles are the real strength of this book. Most notably, Raj Patel's essay, 'The Epistemology of the Supermarket', argues that food inequality will continue as long as disparity in education, employment and housing do. Likewise, Tim Lang insists that 'food is a class affair' with a global history that Britain needs to be more aware of now that the union's borders and foodways with Europe are being redrawn.<sup>2</sup> The volume would have benefited from some similarly rigorous art historical voices to contextualise and analyse the artworks included, to bring them into conversation with one another and the interspersed texts. Without that bridging, however, the artworks and longer written entries seem distant despite their printed contiguity.

*Politics of Food* brings together artworks and texts that address food-related problems from a range of perspectives. Since the book was published, public awareness of food inequalities have been heightened by stockpiling and food poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic. While it does not confront some of the more insidious problems of labour – it is very much a book about those who want to cook, as opposed to those who have to make food – the book is nonetheless intimately involved with the

uses and abuses of commensality. With *Politics of Food*, Delfina Foundation presents a collection of resources for art historians interested in the social and material aspects of food in contemporary art practices.

- 1 Aaron Cezar, 'Forward', in Aaron Cezar and Dani Burrows (eds), *Politics of Food*, exh. cat., London and Berlin, 2019, p. 10.
- 2 Tim Lang, 'Food, Brexit and Culture: What is Food Progress?', in Aaron Cezar and Dani Burrows op. cit., p. 78.

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**C. Oliver O'Donnell, *Meyer Schapiro's Critical Debates: Art Through a Modern Mind*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2019, 253 pages, hardback, ISBN 9780271084640, £79.95.**

*Chloe Julius*

The life of Meyer Schapiro spanned almost the entirety of the twentieth century; his intellectual contribution traced many of the century's major contours. This is the underlying premise of Oliver O'Donnell's book, which takes the neatness of Schapiro's lifespan as an invitation to consider the development of art history in the last century. That such a project is possible is testament to Schapiro's intellectual curiosity and cross-disciplinary approach as an art historian. Yet, it is the successful rendering of this portrait that makes Schapiro's admission that he never

synthesised 'an adequate, satisfying theory of art' so devastating. Opening and closing the book with this citation, O'Donnell uses Schapiro to puncture the triumphalism of the historiography of twentieth century art history, leaving his reader to question how the discipline fell so far below the intellectual aptitude of one of its chief architects.

The book's titular 'critical debates' offer useful placeholders to explore Schapiro's varied intellectual engagement with art and theory. Rather than narrating a series of debates in which Schapiro participated, these 'debates' provide discrete paths into well-trodden scholarly terrain, allowing O'Donnell to tame otherwise wholly unwieldy material. This methodology also emboldens O'Donnell to take on a sacred cow in the existing literature: Schapiro's Marxism.

Although Schapiro's ideas about art continued to develop until he passed away in 1996, his writings from the 1930s have been persistently reappraised, enjoying a notably healthy afterlife in the development of Marxist art history in Britain. Two essays in particular – 'The Social Bases of Art' (1936) and 'The Nature of Abstract Art' (1937) – proved foundational, and the extent to which either provided insight into the concept of artistic freedom (and thus the possibility of a politically engaged practice), beyond the context in which they were written, was regularly debated. While O'Donnell namechecks the 'academic quibbles' about the theoretical divide between these two articles – namely, Andrew Hemingway's gripe that T.J. Clark had characterised the former article as Stalinist – he ultimately presents both as having been mediated through Schapiro's active support of the Communist Party.

Crucially, the 'debate' around which the chapter on Schapiro's Marxism pivots is