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## Book Review: *Surveying the Avant-Garde*

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*Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and the Americas in Transatlantic Magazines*, by Lori Cole. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018. 256 pages, 20 b/w illus. Hardcover \$94.95, paperback \$34.95.

*The Avant-Garde Networks of "Amauta": Argentina, Mexico, and Peru in the 1920s*, edited by Beverly Adams and Natalia Majluf. Lima: Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima, Blanton Museum of Art (Austin, TX), and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), 2019. 352 pages. Paperback \$39.99. Reviewed by Harper Montgomery.

In 1936, during a visit to New York, the editor Eugene Jolas wrote to his wife Maria McDonald in Paris, asking her to collect and send him every copy of the Lima-based and Havana-based magazines *Amauta* and *Revista de avance* that she could find in their home there. Jolas was eager to translate the texts from these magazines into English and publish them in *transition*, a magazine he and McDonald produced in Paris between 1927 and 1938 and sold to readers in Europe and the United States. This single epistolary request conveys not only the intellectual importance of the Cuban and Peruvian publications to a community of transatlantic publishers, but the degree to which the period's effervescent print culture connected readers, translators, and writers. This letter is foregrounded in the introductions of two recent books that convincingly demonstrate the interconnectedness of artists, writers, and activists living in the Americas and Europe during the 1920s and '30s: *The Avant-Garde Networks of "Amauta": Argentina, Mexico and Peru in the 1920s*, edited by Beverly Adams and Natalia Majluf, and *Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and the Americas in Transatlantic Magazines*, by Lori Cole (Cole, 10; Adams and Majluf, 16, who also cite Cole in footnote 7, 22). Both publications present revised histories of a key period of Latin American avant-gardism. They should be required reading for anyone wanting to understand the complexities of these entanglements.

Keeping in mind that one is an exhibition catalog and the other a single-author monograph, we can see that the authors of each book utilize different frameworks to portray the networks fostered by magazines. Cole focuses on the questionnaire, a format that proliferated in the so-called

"little magazines" published in Latin America, the United States, and Europe during the 1920s and '30s, when editors asked prominent writers and artists to respond to questions about avant-gardism and cultural identity and then printed their answers in magazines, at times in a single issue and at times in a series, as a conversation that unfolded across multiple issues. Adams and Majluf and the nine specialists invited to contribute to their volume focus on a single magazine, *Amauta*, examining the manifold ways in which its founder, José Carlos Mariátegui, operated it as a hub that received and relayed enormous amounts of information about culture and politics throughout the Americas and Europe. The books also model the collaborative approaches that produce the interdisciplinary analyses demanded by the art and visual culture of those two decades—so much of which circulated in magazines and existed as prints and printed ephemera alongside experimental poetry and prose. Cole, a specialist in comparative literature, and Adams and Majluf, curators seeking to bring critics, archivists, and historians into the orbit of art historians, demonstrate that interdisciplinary scholarship depends on approaching knowledge production as a cumulative process that incorporates many voices.

Furthermore, both studies bring granular specificity to the discursive textures of print culture that formed coherent forums for debate, assessment, and experimentation, proving that networks shaped artists and writers' realities, and that magazines constituted the most vivid and lively "art world" of the time. Cole, Adams, and Majluf show how digital resources—the scanning of complete runs of magazines and archives and the online availability of archives, like that of

the Archivo José Carlos Mariátegui or the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's International Center for the Arts of the Americas—while making this type of research possible, also bring unprecedented complexity to our understanding of artists' relationships with Europe during this period. Mapping specific links allows researchers to better contextualize antagonisms within particular historical conditions. And the repetition and reframing of European sources, in particular, become actions in which we can detect coloniality but on more nuanced registers that, even though they appear less definitive, are nonetheless charged with politics.

In *Surveying the Avant-Garde*, Cole examines questionnaires sent by editors to intellectuals within their epistolary circuits and then published in magazines in Buenos Aires, Paris, Madrid, and Havana, among many other European and Latin American cities, during the 1920s and early '30s. Cole's study is enormously wide-ranging and potentially unwieldy—hundreds of questionnaires were published in avant-garde and mainstream magazines during the period (8–9). From this mass of material, she nonetheless crafts an enormously compelling narrative, by describing how writers and artists inhabited a universe of alliances and rivalries that crossed oceans, linguistic differences, and national borders. Across five chapters, she examines a seemingly endless succession of questions asked and answered by her protagonists. The pressing urgency with which they felt they must negotiate geopolitics, identity, and creative production becomes crystal clear in accounts that follow the transatlantic meanderings—in person and print—of such key figures as Alejo Carpentier and Jorge Luis Borges. In addition to these canonical figures, others who will be new to readers without a background in literature include the previously mentioned Eugene Jolas, whose magazine *transition* provided the outlet for linguistic translation into English of the period, and Elvira de Alvear, an Argentine who founded *Imán* in Paris and issued wonderfully provocative questionnaires, asking Europeans: “¿Cómo se imaginan ustedes a América Latina?” (How do you imagine Latin America?). Cole also describes the ways in which magazines were utilized as exhibition venues in contexts in which modern art museums and galleries did not yet exist. By considering visual artists within the rich context of print culture and questionnaires, she brings fresh, original, and rigorously grounded interpretations to works by Norah Borges, Xul Solar, and Eduardo Abela, among others. For art historians already familiar with this period in Latin America, Cole's nuanced study connects many dots. She tracks key ideas, including the

themes of pan-language and translation, Latin Americans' relationships with French and Spanish culture, the decay of European culture, and the roots of national culture. Trained as a literary scholar and historian, Cole brings cohesion to her topic by explaining the immense value of the questionnaire for her manifold subjects: her assessment of its abstract qualities, its differences from the manifesto, its use in defining a subject of importance such as “[Latin] American art” or “Argentine art” (even though the substances of these concepts were under dispute), and its function as a tool of assessment for critiquing and historicizing.

Adams and Majluf's volume brings together the work of twelve scholars to present an abundance of new research on the 1920s and '30s that situates Lima—and *Amauta*—at the nucleus of a vibrant intellectual sphere. The essays are written by leading specialists in the overlapping fields of Peruvian, Argentine, and Mexican art history, plus a historian of literary and intellectual history, each of whom examines a relational aspect of *Amauta*'s content. In her essay “The Left and the Latin American Avant-Gardes,” Majluf places Mariátegui within a complex system of orbit of cells of the important political party known by its Spanish initials APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) (66–89), thereby recasting Indigenism as an avant-garde project; and in her second essay, “Indigenism as Avant-Garde,” she assesses the graphic design of *Amauta* within an international field. Roberto Amigo, in “Modern Encounters: José Sabogal in Buenos Aires, 1928” assesses Argentine critics' inability to see the Indigenism of the artist's works on the occasion of a major retrospective (164–69). And Horacio Tarcus, in “Nuestra América: Editorial Exchanges between Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, and Havana,” describes the complex epistolary negotiations of Mariátegui with contacts in the three cities carried out in efforts to found a never-realized pan-Latin American magazine meant to be called *Nuestra América* (180–95).

A number of experts who wrote for the book also made vital adjustments to art historical categories and narratives with their essays. In “Everywhere and Nowhere: Italian Futurism, *Amauta*, and the Latin American Avant-Gardes,” Lynda Klich reveals the highly original and locally inflected ways in which Futurism was molded to socially engaged purposes in Latin America (104–11). Patricia Artundo contributes two essays in which she first examines relationships between key Argentine figures and *Amauta* and then brings to bear the importance of letter writing, magazines, and criticism for a community of intellectuals who found inspiration

from each other in movement: “José Carlos Mariátegui and Emilio Pettoruti: Between Europe and America, 1920–1930” and “Oliverio Gironde, Martín Fierro, and the American Idea” (90–103, 112–19).

Silvia Dolinko, in “Modernity in the Urban Periphery: Graphic Artists and Argentine Social Realism in the 1920s,” places artists typically associated with local concerns within a transnational circuit (170–79). And Natalia de la Rosa, in “Aesthetic Constructions of Latin American Reality: Avant-Garde Dialogues between Mexico and Peru, 1926–1930,” examines Mexicans’ connections with *Amauta* and *Boletín Titikaka* (of Puno) to bring new complexity to the account of Mexican and Peruvian artists’ political alliances (150–63).

*Avant-Garde Networks of “Amauta”* is also an incomparable resource for the field, because it gathers enormous amounts of new information and identifies transnational archival resources. Throughout its essays and plate section, the book introduces many artists, images, and objects that will be new to readers outside of Peru, because they have not been widely published. In his essay on illustration, Ricardo Kusunoki presents some of the most arresting of this material by mining the Mariátegui archives, and the collections of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI), including its library’s holdings of 1920s magazines, calling into question divisions between print and fine art (120–37). Drawings by the Peruvian artists Juan Devéscovi and Carlos Raygada are among the highlights Kusunoki covers, but his selections point to a fertile vein of image research for future scholars. That Adams and Majluf made a point of facilitating contributors’ access to newly available research resources (many essayists cite letters newly available through the Mariátegui archive in Lima), suggest that their own collaborative approach to exhibition making informed the methods that resulted in this collection of transnational and interdisciplinary essays. Indeed, the entire book is bursting with resources that complicate art history’s understanding of Indigenismo, avant-gardism, and nationalism: Peruvian paintings, prints, and drawings, including posters for a state education agency by Camilo Blas and images made in a wide range of visual idioms by Carlos Quíspin Asín; a

chronology of *Amauta*’s production and dissemination; information about the national and international distributors of *Amauta*; biographies of some fifty-eight people who formed Mariátegui’s network in Peru, Latin America, the United States, and Europe (compiled and written by Pablo Cruz, Majluf, and Ana Torres); and an exhaustive bibliography encompassing archival material from institutions in Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, France, and Spain, as well as recent literature. Other key resources included are an essay by Fernanda Beigel closely analyzing two key editorial statements written by Mariátegui for *Amauta*, as well as a detailed bibliographic entry by Torres. Making this scholarship available in English will change how Peruvian art is taught in classrooms and represented in museums in the United States.

Methodologically unorthodox, *The Avant-Garde Networks of “Amauta”* and *Surveying the Avant-Garde* raise key questions about the future of scholarship on Latin American art and visual culture of the 1920s and ’30s, a moment widely lauded as the ground zero of an anticolonial rupture from European models of artistic production but heretofore mostly addressed within the parameters of discrete nations. Recent exceptions include Michele Greet’s *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars* (Yale, 2018), Jordana Mendelson’s *Encounters with the 1930s* (Reina Sofia, 2012), and Harper Montgomery’s *The Mobility of Modernism: Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (University of Texas, 2017). Both Cole and Adams and Majluf’s studies move this trend in the field forward by demonstrating how national identity and avant-garde art and culture can only be adequately understood by attending to the vibrant relationships and debates played out in innovative magazines and energetic epistolary exchanges. Both books are convincing examples for why the mapping of artistic networks should be prioritized methodologically in studies of Latin American art of the 1920s and ’30s.

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