



When we published the first issue of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in December 1986 we certainly never imagined we would be working on this editorial project 27 years later. In fact, though we put a number 1 on our first issue, we did not really realize we might put out a second issue. There is a deep history of artist-run small journals and magazines, including notable examples from the abstract expressionist period such as *The Tiger's Eye* and *Possibilities*, with short runs—there was only one *Possibilities*—so there would have been no dishonor in publishing only one issue. But we were encouraged by a warm response from our community in New York and from friends and some strangers around the country, so after a year we put out our second issue, then published twice a year for 10 years, then we published an anthology with Duke University Press in 2000, then in 2002 we began *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online*, which remains a space where we can put together something if we feel moved to do so.

The first issue was an intervention, a cultural action undertaken at a particularly charged political and discursive moment of cultural transformation. Sometime in 1979 the values of artistic practice and political activism that had characterized our coming of age in the late 60s and early 70s were suddenly turned on their heads. As we wrote in the introduction to our 25th anniversary issue, there was exponential growth and accelerating hype of the 1980s art market operating in tandem with institutional

and commodity critiques often announced in obdurate and obscure theory language. If *intervention* was one buzzword of the day—defining a limited political act distinct from the large utopian movements for social change of the 1960s and 1970s—*irony* was another, contributing to a moral equivalency and destabilizing humanistic concepts including that of meaning itself. As we considered what to call our new publication, *meaning* seemed the concept most discredited by the market and academic discourse in the 1980s. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* announced an ethical and philosophical dimension, but one that operated within the postmodern discursive field: the slashes that separate *M* from *E* from *A* from *N* from *I* from *N* from *G* indicated that we were placing meaning back on the table of contemporary art, but with an inflected critical perception that shared aspects of the postmodern.

We both came from families of Jewish artists who were refugees from Hitler's Europe. Our parents were politically left-wing with a rich interest in art and culture. They were friendly, and so we had met as children. We met again in 1979 and found many points of common interest: we were both painters interested in poetic and political narrative in our work and in an eclectic and rich mix of contemporary art and art of the past, and we had both been involved in feminist activism in the 70s. We responded to the changes in the art world first by joining a small group of artists and critics who met monthly to discuss contemporary exhibitions.

As this group broke up, affected by deepening aesthetic polarizations and by the death of participants who were early victims of AIDS, we began to think about a more public forum for our points of view. In fact, in our first issue we published a memorial tribute to the artist Porfirio DiDonna, who had died prematurely, and diary excerpts from a young artist, Rene Santos, who had been part of our monthly critic and artist group before he died of AIDS in 1985.

Another important catalyst to the publication of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s first issue was an essay that Mira had worked on over a period of a couple of years that was a strong critique of the politics of David Salle's depiction of women and the critical defense of such misogynist representations. This essay, "Appropriated Sexuality," had an interesting, significant history of rejection from mainstream publications and from the principal critical organ of the period, *October*. It was finally accepted for publication by the respected Chicago-based magazine the *New Art Examiner*, only to have them drop it at the last minute and subsequently publish a less politically charged consideration of the same theme by another author.

At that point we thought, okay, let's start our own journal and publish this piece and others that also probably wouldn't ever see the light of day. We assembled writings by people we admired and were in contact with. These pieces were by the artists, poets, and art historians who formed our circle of acquaintances. For the

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TEXT / SUSAN BEE & MIRA SCHOR



first issue, we turned to Susan's husband, poet and critic Charles Bernstein, to write a polemical piece called "For M/E/A/N/I/N/G." It clarified our stance against the glossy art magazines and toward a more poetic and idiosyncratic approach to writing about art. Then we had Mira's piece about David Salle, "Appropriated Sexuality." Our good friend, art historian, poet, and artist Johanna Drucker, contributed a detailed analytical piece that critiqued a French exhibition curated by Jean-François Lyotard. Then we ran short pieces in memory of Porfirio DiDonna and Rene Santos. Mimi Gross wrote a poetic and wacky piece about art that would not have been accepted elsewhere. Susan wrote a list of all the uncensored remarks that people, including dealers and other artists, had made about her work in her studio over the years. They were not attributed, but were quoted verbatim as a list of sentences. Then we had a wonderful piece by artist Vanalyne Green about the intersection of feminism and her love of baseball. With this first issue, we laid out our differences from the glossies as well as from other critical publications of the time, such as *Heresies* and *October*. Our publication was going to critique the mainstream and politically correct approaches to art whether from the left or right. We wanted to occupy a new space that we were mapping out with this first issue.

This group of idiosyncratic, poetic, polemical, and eccentric writings would not have been welcome in the glossy mainstream art magazines or in the more staid academic journals. We each invested \$500 and our own labor in production and design. Mira typed much of the first issue into a friend's Mac, which seemed to take up half the room, and probably had less computing power than any kid's toy today, and Susan did the layout and design in the old style, pasting up each issue by hand.

With text, cover, and logo designed by Susan, the magazine measured 8.5 by 11 inches, perfect

bound with the exception of the first four side-stapled issues. Our decision to exclude pictures was financial—it cost too much money to have images, and it made our journal different from the glossies. We were interested in creating a design that emphasized readability and legibility. You had to actually read *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, not just look at the pictures! And as a writer, you had to base your opinions on close textual examination of artworks because you couldn't rely on pictures to do the work for you. We made a flyer for our first issue and sent out subscription notices and were shocked when we got maybe 100 subscriptions, one of them from Louise Bourgeois! That response encouraged us to continue with this quixotic project. Our budgets remained extremely modest throughout our years of publication and we did not run ads, which was a significant departure from mainstream magazines; after our first two issues, however, we received modest funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts helped us publish our final double issue as a "visual forum," which featured a single image from most contributors in alphabetical order alongside a thorough index to the full run of the magazine. Our first cover was on a heavy silver card stock, and from then on each issue had a different and distinctive color cover—be it copper, orange, yellow, watermelon pink, maroon, black, or green—and our subscribers looked forward to the pleasurable surprise of what color we had chosen. In a bow to our beginnings, our final issue had a glossy silver cover.

We did all the mailings and subscription fulfillment ourselves, mostly in Mira's living room. We had no help. No interns were involved and there was no Internet or computer, so everything went out slowly by snailmail. Editorial meetings were held in person or on the landline telephone. In the early years we often held our editorial meetings at Magoo's, the artists' café in

Tribeca, which was near Mira's apartment and Susan's studio. Because we were just two editors, we had a sense of scale that was personal. There was only the schedule that we created together, and as friends we usually agreed on the contents. All of which made for a kind of intimacy that seems lacking in this time of instant feedback and Facebook.

Publishing *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* revealed and created an artistic and discursive community for us. In a huge art world we had created a small bit of cultural real estate, a ground. We organized a series of artist presentations including talks by David Reed, Mimi Gross, Mira, and others at Sorkin Gallery in Tribeca in 1998; we held panel discussions of younger artists including R.H. Quaytman and Julia Jacquette at Parsons in 1994, and with David Humphrey, Barbara Pollack, and others on resistance at A.I.R. Gallery in New York in 2001. We also had parties for several of the issues. One memorable party took place at Carolee Schneemann's Chelsea loft in 1989, and we also hosted book parties at local galleries. A number of issues included forums where we would develop a question that was of particular interest to us as artists at a given moment and then invite artists to respond, publishing the results in forums, on racism, on motherhood and art, on creativity and community, on making art over time. These were subjects of vital importance to artists in their art and their daily lives, not necessarily subjects that would ever be given consideration in mainstream art magazines or academic art journals, though we started noticing some of these publications following what seemed to be our lead a few years after we began.

Our early experiences in the feminist art movement influenced our editorial position in a manner that extended to the publication of texts by women artists, art historians, and poets that focused on contemporary feminist theory, underappreciated women artists, and the influ-

ence of domestic practices coded as feminine on performance and installation. These important and influential essays included Amelia Jones' "Post-Feminism"—A Remasculinization of Culture" and Faith Wilding's "Monstrous Domesticity." As significant was *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s organic act of putting feminist political theory into practice in our assertion of an independent, iconoclastic, heterodox, noncommercial, nonprogrammatic editorial field of art and critical practice at a time of polarized critical and theoretical orthodoxies. We refused to congeal into any unified, singular, doctrinaire, or commodifiable point of view.

Our publishing schedule was also very much our own: we would work on the final proof of each issue in a concentrated fashion for a couple of months, having gathered material for a couple of months before that, following up on questions we and other artist/writers around us had about art making and the art world of that time but with no art world calendar in mind—no time-stamped prescribed march from "upcoming" to "best of," no procession from blockbuster to blockbuster, or biennial to biennale. We took great care with each issue and because the issues were published only twice a year, every article, book review, interview, and forum response was handled with professional courtesy and detailed critiques.

We had different styles of editing—Susan was detailed, firm yet diplomatic, Mira good at suggesting major reordering of text and sometimes more argumentative about ideas. We agreed with each other's approaches and views, and both of us tried to be as encouraging as possible. We were always impressed by how even one round of suggestions would yield terrific second drafts of texts. And compared to our experiences with editors at other journals, we edited with a relatively light hand.

We encouraged visual artists to write serious essays about artists and ideas they were inter-

ested in. We allowed the writers to keep their own style of writing instead of imposing a house style, length was based on content rather than word count considerations, and because we did not publish reproductions, we encouraged our writers to embed their critical views in descriptions of the artworks themselves. To this day there is something special about the kind of writings this editorial approach generated: among these, of note, Pamela Wye's "Florine Stettheimer: Eccentric Power, Invisible Tradition," and "Nancy Spero: Speaking in Tongues"; and Nancy K. Miller's "Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer—Art Spiegelman's *Maus*."

We also gave artists the opportunity for idiosyncratic writings that operated between artist statements and esoteric subjects, before *Cabinet*, for example, institutionalized its format of eccentric thematics. Artists knew that we were interested in publishing their writings, so they would send us various pieces they had written for our consideration. These writings were often on odd topics such as bats, feminist views of baseball, and rabbits, and done in unusual formats such as manifestos, diary excerpts, interviews, and poems. They fell outside the usual parameters of theory or art criticism that was being published elsewhere, as well as outside the themes of our forums. These included such writings as Tom Knechtel's "Bats," Ann McCoy's "The Critic and the Hare: Meditations on the Death of My Rabbit," Joel Fisher's "The Success of Failure," Richard Tuttle's "September 21, 1989," and Nancy Spero's "The Discovered Uncovered," a piece Spero originally submitted to *Artforum* in 1967 that we were proud to finally publish in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* #2 in 1987.

We started this journal unsure of how long we would continue. When we developed subscribers, and got grants and submissions to the magazine, the project took off. During the 10 years that we published the print edition, in try-

ing to identify a timely theme or forum topic, often we would float various ideas around to see how they might be addressed by our community, and by operating on our own schedule we could respond quickly once a topic had sprung forth from among many concerns. There was a gradual building to the style of the magazine. It was personal, political, whimsical, and attuned to our own interests and issues. By the end of the 10 years during which we published 20 issues of the print journal, we were both ready to move on. We had both developed our individual careers and needed more time for our own work, but in fact we remained quite active working on *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in the next few years: first we spent a number of years putting together the anthology, which went to two publishers and required extensive editing. It came out in 2000. After that we decided in 2002 to start the online journal. It seemed like a way to stay current without the expense and the commitment of the print journal. We also have posted issues in a more spontaneous fashion, not being on a definite schedule.

Although we enjoy the speed and accessibility of the web and the ability to publish color images and video and to provide useful links, there was something special and perhaps with greater gravitas about an actual hard-copy magazine. We think people still love to hold something in their hands.

Perhaps our only regret about the 25th-anniversary edition of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, which we published in late 2011, is that it only exists in digital format. This issue, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online* #5, is available online in a number of digital platforms. It included 81 responses from artists, poets, art historians, and art writers, writing as individuals or as small collaborative groupings, in response to questions about the impact on their artworks and criticism of public traumas such as 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rise in income inequality, and about the



nature of privacy in the age of social networking and global spectacle. The writings were varied in style of address but joined by political passion that was in part spurred by the wave of optimism sparked by Occupy Wall Street, which had just made its first appearance earlier that fall. Its wide availability in digital and Kindle format is great, yet it would have been wonderful to have a print version of it as well. The issue was a gigantic undertaking, and it took a lot of detailed organizing, correspondence, and editing. We're not sure we'll be able to do such a big project again.

M/E/A/N/I/N/G now exists in a landscape of art publication both completely different and strangely familiar (different in the proliferation of online magazines—like *Triple Canopy*, *e-flux*, *Hyperallergic*—which provide similar opportunities for writers to write in less commercially prescribed ways, and of blogs such as Sharon Butler's *Two Coats of Paint*, which offer generally short-form writing and aggregation of other online material, video interviews, links to exhibitions). In addition, alternative and locally based publications such as *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Paper Monument*, and *Cabinet* have sprung up and flourished. These alternative publications have taken root in a community-oriented space such as the one that brought us to found our journal so many years ago.

The context of the larger magazines has also changed, and remained the same. There are

fewer art reviews and features in *The New York Times* than 27 years ago, and the firing of art, film, and book reviewers by many of the few remaining major newspapers in the country diminishes the general basis of culture. Meanwhile, major art magazines such as *Art in America* seem to be struggling to retain advertisers and identity. On the surface, the critical imperium of *October* seems diminished, though its influence can still be felt.

In 2013, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online #6* was published with a digital reissue of the original 20 hard-copy issues of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, 1986–1996, on Jacket2 Reissues, an archival platform for magazines committed to poetry and poetics. All the hard-copy issues of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* from #1 to #19/20, along with their distinctive covers, a different color for each issue, have been scanned to PDF, which can be viewed and downloaded from Jacket2 Reissues. It was very moving for us to see all this material again.

This reissue effort offers a wonderful opportunity to sample the full range of material published in the journal, including many writings that were not collected in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, published by Duke University Press in 2000. The reissue places writings by Mira Schor, Amelia Jones, Johanna Drucker, Thomas McEvelley, Faith Wilding, Susan Bee, Charles Bernstein, and many others into their original context, historically and critically. The reissue

on Jacket2 also makes available for the first time the many book reviews that were a regular feature of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. We take note also of writings by the artists and art historians who have since died, including Hugh Steers, Rudolph Baranik, David von Schlegell, Leon Golub, Spero, McEvelley, and others. We are struck by the diversity and sheer number of artists, art historians, poets, and critics we published over the 10 years of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*'s hard-copy existence: people who were famous and people who were just-emerging artists, people who were part of our extended network of artistic and intellectual communities and who helped create the community of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*.

It's now 27 years since our first issue. After stopping with the print issues, we have continued our collaboration on a more sporadic basis, especially since going online. We have each focused our energies in the studio and on individual book and writing projects and, in recent years, we have endured struggles and tragedies in our personal lives that sometimes of necessity drew our energy away from editing the journal; but it remains a continued space of possibility for us, from which we can build something temporary, effect an intervention, if and whenever we want to make *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*.

Susan Bee is a painter, editor, and book artist living in New York. She recently had a solo show, *Criss Cross: New Paintings*, at Accola Griefen Gallery. Bee has had six solo shows at A.I.R. Gallery. She has published many artist books, including numerous collaborations. Her artwork is in many public and private collections, including the Getty Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Yale University, New York Public Library, and the Harvard University Library. Bee teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and the School of Visual Arts.

Mira Schor is a painter and writer living in New York. Schor has had recent solo exhibitions at Marvelli Gallery and at CB1 Gallery. Her work has been included in exhibitions at the Jewish Museum in New York, the Armand Hammer Museum at UCLA, P.S.1, the Neuberger Museum, and the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum. She is the author of *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life*; *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art*; and of the blog *A Year of Positive Thinking*. She is an associate teaching professor in fine arts at Parsons The New School for Design in New York.

The *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* archive is in the collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale University. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online* at: <http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning>