

Autonomous Art Systems

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Media-N, the Journal of the New Media Caucus, invited submissions for this issue about the use of Autonomous Art Systems, tethered and untethered systems of making, autonomous vehicles, and related programming in creative fields of study. Relevant subjects included: artworks that address concepts of drones or surveillance as subject or form; the influence of emerging technologies on studio art practices; or critical/historical analysis of the entanglement of art and technology.

While offering insight into how artists are working with these evolving and emerging systems, especially in an ever-changing environment of current and pending legislation, this issue draws parallels between autonomous art systems and the impact of portable video recorders on the arts in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In looking back on specific histories of art and technology, this issue's contributors reference immediacy and shifts in artistic production but perhaps more importantly, pose the question: how will these new abilities, access, perspectives, and possible restrictions on technology be reflected in art practice of the future?

By offering artists new visual perspectives and production values previously unattainable without substantial funding, autonomous art systems offer access to both reference and production imagery which have significantly impacted the speed and scope of answered questions and desired research in the artists' studio. The immediate ability to explore our physical world untethered and share this information is both empowering and overwhelming to the artist, unbounded, albeit for the span of the battery life.

We received many excellent submissions and writings from our peers with the original call for proposals; we carefully curated this issue's selection to share a variety of experiences, techniques and pitfalls with you.

Echoing the speed of image acquisition and technology, the development of this specific issue has seen autonomous art systems carry prominent weight in international news with use by humanitarian groups, terrorists, activists, educators and artists alike. Multiple versions of commercially available "unmanned" and autonomous air systems have been released with constantly shifting legislation in the United States regarding privacy and legality of these devices. In the fall of 2018, Chinese UAS manufacturer DJI announced its first product that will carry a Hasselblad camera lens after their purchase of a majority stake in the Swedish camera company we

recognize as creating the medium-format film cameras that were used in the Apollo missions to the Moon by the United States.

The following readings were presented as a report of the current state of autonomous or “unmanned” art systems in February of 2017. They now exist as a time capsule of this societal moment as the field continues to fluctuate and evolve with increasing speed. We believe, at this point, it can be stated that as these systems mature, they become more autonomous, and we’re aware that they start to look back on us. We wonder, how does this change our approach to art making, to living with surveillance, to the political? With each of these essays, the point-of-view shifts and considers the possible implications of this new tool being integrated into the fabric of our lives. This writing covers a fraction of current activity concerning autonomous art systems; as these new tools become more accessible, prevalent, and pervasive, we will continue to track the conversations.