In a digital age when high-resolution images and instant content are just a swipe away, makers of print books—whether cutting-edge publishers or your next-door neighbor—are uncovering ways to add value with more than just heftier paper stock. In fact, there is a mini-boom in art books underway, giving ample room for more experimental publishers (sometimes even galleries) to prove their worth with projects that raise the stakes in both content and form.

Marking anniversaries, three organizations revved up their intellectual output, rather than resting on laurels. In Hong Kong, trailblazing gallery Hanart TZ displayed a 600-page super-catalog as a springboard to investigate China’s most tumultuous century. Singapore’s first independent alternative art space, the Substation, proving the efficacy of its collaborative approach, gathered as many perspectives as its 10 years of an ambitious commorative publication on its 20th anniversary. On the occasion of a major Billy Apple retrospective at the Auckland Art Gallery, the artist’s longtime collaborator Wystan Curnow presents the story of a four-decades-long labor of love that is the artist’s unique brand.

Several monographs released in 2015 yield the page to primary materials produced by their subjects, to the immense benefit of readers. In one, Beijing-based installationist Yin Xiuzhen shares previously unpublished writings and a photographic tour of her studio, captured by husband Jing Dong. Meanwhile, in another volume, Japanese artist Koki Tanaka’s unfiltered journalistic entries offer insight to his social, collaborative practice. A new monograph includes an exact reproduction of Kazuo Shiraga’s actual scrapbook, opening a window into the artist’s world, just as the first book on the Philippines’ most celebrated conceptual artist, Roberto Chabet, pays tribute to his abundant practice with a playful design, including artwork pullouts and colorful inserts.

Publishers are looking further ahead, no longer letting worthy subjects languish in places the art market forgot. Ni Beircéadain lives up to its name, bottling the sheer adrenaline that drove an American couple to chase abstractions from Australia’s Indigenous communities. In New Delhi, a private museum doesn’t shy away from the raw, girly, difficult-to-capture aesthetics of Nalini Malani’s video and installation practice. An inquiry into the purpose of the “archive” taps disruptive voices from Afghanistan to Abu Dhabi, while a second edition of a survey of Turkish art goes further back in time, to 1974, tracking the opening of a nation and its art. Tongue-in-cheek collective Slavs and Tatars, whose self-described area of focus is “East of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China,” present a production accompanying their most recent cycle of work. It offers, on each page, bonus tips on rating for future objects and desires, it is Machiavelli’s Tiv Prince, because, well, why not? It might even be useful to one of those art mega-collectors out there, or someone they work for. Everywhere in the print world these days, more is more. 30F
Books

Koldi Tanaka: Precarious Practice
EDITED BY DEUTSCHE BANK

Deutsche Bank’s 2015 “Artist of the Year” monograph covets Koldi Tanaka with texts about and by the Los Angeles-based Japanese artist, who promises to review his practice “as carefully as possible.” In 31 journal-like entries accompanying images of projects from his early years exploring everyday objects and actions to later works homing in on people, participation and performance, Tanaka describes moments both his 2013 Japan Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale and small, an unrealized project from the same year, represented by a black space. Closer attention to detail might have remedied captions that are frequently brief or missing altogether, or the scrapbook-like layout that, while fitting, can make text or images difficult to decipher. A section dedicated to Tanaka’s book of correspondence does not include a single excerpt. Like the artist, this honest, personal book is gently and imperfectly impactful. SB

Slavs and Tatars – Mirrors for Princes
EDITED BY ANTHONY COWEN

Slavs and Tatars’ Mirrors for Princes is equal parts exhibition catalog, essay collection and medieval Uighur self-help book. The Turan-obsessed artist collective directs its attention to the titular genre of “advice literature” for leaders, focusing on the 13th-century Kaiqadu Bilig (“Wisdom of Royal Glory”) written by Yutudu Khubilai for the prince of Kashgar. Quotations from Kaiqadu Bilig in Uighur line the edge of pages along with their Arabic, German, Polish, Turkish and English translations. Elsewhere are images of Slavs and Tatars’ pin-funded interactive exhibits, along with essays from academics and curators. Columbus University professor Munan Ahmed Aref relates how a 1990 TV drama drew ancient political philosophy into Indian nationalism, while University of Glasgow professor Lloyd Ridgeon investigates the intersection of hairstyles, Islam and power. Irreverent as always, Slavs and Tatars continue to challenge East-West binaries. SF

3 Parallel Artworks: 100 Art Things from Chinese Modern History
EDITED BY CHANG TSONG-TUNG, GAO SHIMING AND VALERIE C. DORAN

In 2014, Hong Kong art patron and dealer Chang Tsong-tung’s Hanart TZ Gallery celebrated its 30th anniversary with “Hanart 100: Idiosyncrasies,” a symposium and non-sale showcase of works from Chang’s collection of modern and contemporary Chinese art. Expanding on that landmark event, the 483-page super-catalogue 3 Parallel Artworks: 100 Art Things from Chinese Modern History posts that there are more “worlds” — the literati tradition, the socialist state and globalized capitalism — than the purists of the 20th-century Chinese art. Essays by 14 of Chang’s curators, including curator Gao Shiming and conceptual artist Qiu Zhijie, are followed by a section highlighting the gallery’s game-changing projects, like “China’s New Art, Post-1989” (1990-97). Lovingly crafted inside and out, it is a worthy contribution to the archive of scholarly books on China’s most tumultuous century. SB

EDITED BY HALIL ALTHİNDER AND SÜREYYA ERKIN

Almost a decade after the first edition, User’s Manual 2.0 starts 11 years earlier and ends 10 years later, profiling 101 artists from Turkey in this massive tome edited by artist Halil Altindere and writer Süreyya Erkin. While each artist gets two spreads of glossy images representing their practice, the front third of the volume contains 16 bilingual (Turkish-English) texts — some reprinted from the first edition, others newly commissioned — surveying the development of contemporary art and its ecosystem amid Turkey’s economic and political opening to the world. New contributions primarily come from past Istanbul Bienal curators such as Pulya Erdeniz, Charles Esche, Hui Hart, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and also include Ahu Antmen’s survey of gender constructs in late 20th-century Turkey and Osman Eldem’s overview of the last 15 years, packing maximum information into a slender art scene into one tome. HGM

Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Culture and Contested Narratives in the Middle East
EDITED BY ANTHONY GORMLEY

How should the relationship between contemporary art and the archive be defined and negotiated? What purpose does the archive serve? These and other questions are probed through writings and artworks by filmmakers, artists, curators and writers in Dissonant Archives, the second volume in a series produced by the Kamel Lazaar Foundation, a Geneva-based nonprofit that focuses on visual culture in North Africa and the Middle East. The anthology begins in Afghanistan with filmmaker Marjam Ghanj’s case study of the Afghan Films archive, which argues that in a country where cultural resources are subject to burning, looting and destruction, the archive can be a “site of resistance and possibility.” In Lebanon, photographer Lucien Tamaha reveals the shortfalls of the archivist’s approach, while New York’s Gulf Labor Coalition presents their one-year campaign 2013-14 that highlights the controversies surrounding the construction on Abu Dhabi’s Saadiyat Island. DT
edited by Lotte Betting, Saumya Bhattacharyya and Johann蟠

Nalini Malani is known for her mixed-media works and large-scale shadow-play installations that address issues of gender and transnational politics. Though she has exhibited internationally since the 1980s, it was only in 2014 that she had her first retrospective in her native India—a major survey at New Delhi’s Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. The exhibition’s catalog, Nalini Malani: You Can’t Keep Acid in a Paper Bag, comprises a wide-ranging selection of visuals from the show, as well as essays and archival materials documenting her artistic journey. Reflecting Malani’s penchant for video pieces, the aesthetic tone of the book is dark and often grainy—but with a raw and human sensibility. This, in turn, is effectively juxtaposed with intermittent bursts of dynamic color that appear in her other works, such as the bright-yellow canvases comprising her installation Cassandra (2009). HK

Kazuo Shiraga

Between 1953 and 1965, Japanese painter Kazuo Shiraga kept a personal scrapbook documenting his most pivotal years with the Gutai Art Association. Reproduced in full for the first time, the scrapbook unravels a new perspective of appreciating his artistic evolution. Kazuo Shiraga is a murale composizione that comprises not only his personal notes and documentation, but also other archival photographs of Gutai events, full-color plates of his heralded foot paintings and academic texts contextualising the postwar artist’s six-decade career. Gutai specialist Ming Thang Pham relates Shiraga’s visual vocabulary to Japanese matsuri ("festival") culture, while Columbus University’s John Rachman drives into wider historical discourse to conclude ways in which Shiraga achieved a higher disposition in action painting than artists of the American avant-garde. A significant addition to the growing English-language literature on Shiraga, this densely packed monograph provides an enlightening visual and scholarly read. DT

Delincence Books and Prestel

No Boundaries: Aboriginal Australian Contemporary Abstract Painting
edited by Henry F. Silverett

Published to accompany a traveling exhibition of works drawn from the private collection of American collectors Debra and Dennis Scholl, No Boundaries surveys the lives of nine Aboriginal abstract painters hailing from southwestern Australia. A casual visit seven years ago to Sydney’s Art Gallery of New South Wales where Dennis encountered the museum’s Indigenous art collection ignited a loose affair with Aboriginal abstraction. The Scholls, already veteran collectors of Western contemporary art, then traversed the Australian Kimberley Desert in search of paintings that left them “overcome by [their] power, spirituality and quantity.” Full-color plates, photographs and scholarly and anecdotal contributions—including an account about Warlimpirnga Tjapaltjarri, who emerged from the wilderness as Australia’s “last uncontacted” Indigenous people—take readers through the Scholls’ expedition of discovering, in their words, “some of the finest abstract painters this planet has ever seen.” DT

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Sold on Apple: The Complete Wystan Curnow Writings
by Wystan Curnow

"Billy Apple is the artist; I am the critic," declares Wystan Curnow in the first of a chronological collection of more than 40 essays, reviews and interview transcripts that register an ongoing conversation between himself and New Zealand’s foremost conceptualist. Over the last 40 years, Curnow has become Apple’s close collaborator; he writes poetically for the artist—not just art criticism but exhibition texts and even phrases that end up in the artworks—crafting and promoting the "Billy Apple" brand and even managing the artist’s public relations. Published on the occasion of a major 2015 retrospective at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Sold on Apple reveals the seminal critic’s decades-long mission to explain, mediate and promote Apple’s practice—first introducing him to a provincial art community in New Zealand, then later to audiences worldwide. DC

Yin Xiuzhen

By Wu Hung, Hou Hanru and Stephanie Rosenthal

The very first monograph on Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen investigates the genesis of a body of work that consistently comprises used clothing, cement, suitcases or combinations thereof, as metaphors for memory, demobilization and globalization. One of three main contributors, art historian Wu Hung delves into these thematic "threads," discussing on the artist’s sculptures, installations and public interventions as bearers of lived experiences, subversive in relation to cities mass-produced in the name of progress and critiques of power structures—"in words of commerce or international relations—that homogenize local and global spaces and communicate. Yin’s voice is heard regularly throughout the book, whether in interviews, copious quotes embedded in essays or her own—previously unpublished—writings on specific projects. Husband and fellow artist Dongdong’s photo tour around her studio and an illustrated chronology of past exhibitions mapping back to 1994 round off the steady survey. BC

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Book Review