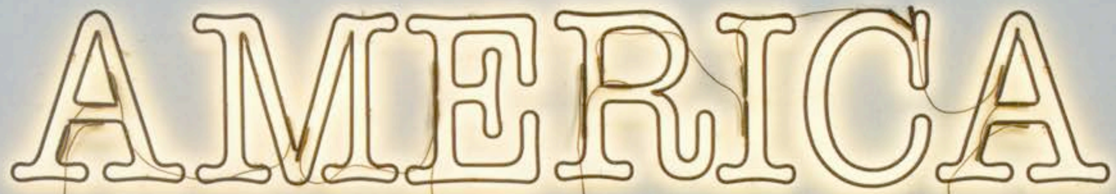

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New Regionalism

Concepts of cultural globalization captivate the art world today. International art fairs and biennials have shaped these ideas, as have globally networked museums, galleries, dealers, auction houses, collectors, and artists. Critic Nicolas Bourriaud argues that contemporary globalization has generated a new "Altermodern" approach to art that abandons limiting concepts of "nationalism and identity-tagging."[8] The curators of the Whitney's 2006 Biennial similarly observed:

> *The definition of what constitutes "American" is in dramatic flux. Artists, and curators, are moving round the world with an ever-greater fluidity, often living or working between countries, traveling back and forth from New York, Los Angeles, Puerto Rico, and Chicago to Istanbul, Thailand, Zurich, Berlin, Milan, and London.*

BIENNALES/BIENNIALS

Large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art called "biennales" or "biennials" are staged every two years, held for brief periods (usually 12 weeks), named after their host city, and typically funded and managed by a combination of public and private agencies. In 2015, for example, the U.S. Department of State, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation were among the sponsors of Joan Jonas's installation in the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (fig. 124). The first biennale was held in Venice in 1895, and others followed in New York (the Whitney Biennial started in 1932), São Paulo (1951), Basel (Art Basel in Switzerland started in 1970), and Sydney (1973). Fairs focused on modern and contemporary art are not new: the Carnegie International, held every three to five years in Pittsburgh, started in 1896; Documenta, held every five years in Kassel, Germany, started in 1955. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, their numbers exploded, with art fair and biennial upstarts in Beijing, Berlin, Cairo, Dakar, Dubai, Gwangju, Havana, Istanbul, Liverpool, Lyon, Mexico City, Miami, Mozambique, New Delhi, Santa Fe, Shanghai, Sharjah, Singapore, and Taipei, among other places.

A highly visible face of cultural globalization, the biennial phenomenon continues to expand in the 21st century. The Marrakech Biennale was launched in 2005; the Tarrawarra Biennial began in 2008. In 2014, at least 98 biennials, and a few "triennials," were staged worldwide, in 46 different countries. Remapping the terrain of contemporary art, biennials legitimate the cultural cachet of their host cities. They also play major roles in cultural tourism: 475,000 people attended La Biennale di Venezia in 2012.

Like the world's fairs held in the 19th and 20th centuries in cities like London (1851), Philadelphia (1876), Paris (1889), Chicago (1893), Buffalo (1901), St. Louis (1904), Manila (1912), San Francisco (1915), Barcelona (1929), New York (1939), Seattle (1962), New York (1964), and Osaka (1970), biennials condense contemporary global culture in accessible and often spectacular spaces, emphasizing art on experiential terms. "A smartly orchestrated biennale," remarks art historian Chris McAuliffe, "is a combination of magic mystery tour and high-brow theme park. Today's biennale visitor traverses the city, map (or app) in hand, adding the thrill of discovery to the experience of the art works themselves" (2014).

▲ **186** Scott Hocking, *Hephaestus and the Garden of the Gods, Snow from the Series: Garden of the Gods, 2009–2010*, 2010. Archival pigment print/mixed-media installation. Print: 33 × 49.5 in; installation: dimensions variable.

This fluidity has created a complicated network of communication and artistic exchange that refuses to be contained by geographical borders and that creates arcs which traverse vast distances.[9]

Whether or not today's cultural globalization is simply an updated version of modern cultural colonialism, a rather blatant demonstration of neoliberalism's rapacious appetites, or a sign of genuine interests in global artistic diversity is open to debate.[10] While global networking has reconfigured patterns of cultural, economic, and social exchange, the specifics of place—geographic, civic, political, historical—remain resonant for many American artists.

For some "New Regionalists," place is literally referenced in images of distinctive local landscapes, like Scott Hocking's (b. 1975) photographs of his native Detroit (fig. 186). As Hocking observes: "I've experienced the Motor City on foot, found solace within the empty factories and overgrown lots, and discovered beauty in the decay and transformations. This is my home base. It has taken time, but I love the clarity that comes with that time."[11] Hocking creates his own myths about Detroit's postindustrial landscape, creating site-specific installations with materials found while exploring its abandoned ruins. In 2009, he placed the shells of TV sets on top of the gigantic martini-glass-shaped concrete columns that once supported the roof of the Packard Automotive Plant, a massive, 3.5-million-square-foot factory designed by

Albert Kahn in 1903 and built on the city's east side. He documented the site over the next year, noting seasonal variations in weather and light, observing the tensions between ordered design and decay. Formerly symbols of American industrial power, Detroit's Packard plant and other derelict factories are today the favorite subjects of "ruin porn": romanticized images of urban decay that rarely critique—unlike Hocking—the historical and political conditions that led to the nation's postindustrial decline.

▲ **187** Postcommodity, *Na'nizhoozhi da' nijahigi na' a'ahi (Gallup Motel Butchering)*, 2011. Four-channel video installation with sound, dimensions variable. Video still.

For other artists, place is remembered in performances that transpose traditional tribal rituals onto the culturally homogenous spaces of 21st-century tourism. This is the subject of *Na'nízhoozhí da' nijahigi na' a'ahi (Gallup Motel Butchering)*, a four-channel video produced by Postcommodity, an American Indian arts collective founded in 2007 and based in Phoenix (fig. 187). Postcommodity members Raven Chacon (Navajo, b. 1977), Cristóbal Martinez (who identifies as Mestizo and "Alcaldeño," b. 1974), Kade L. Twist (Cherokee, b. 1971), and Nathan Young (Pawnee/Delaware/Kiowa, b. 1975) originate from and live in the Southwest—Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Oklahoma—inhabiting both traditional tribal homelands and the megacity of Phoenix, the sixth largest in the United States. Today, while a majority of American Indians live and work in urban settings, tribal and regional affiliations remain strong. As the artists state: "Everything that defines us, as Indigenous people, and our relationships—worldview, culture, spirituality, memory, context, meaning, etc.—goes back to the land. Through our art practice, we seek to advance a discourse about self-determination that is accountable to our locality."[12] Their video of the ritualized slaughter of a lamb in a motel bathroom in Gallup, New Mexico, depicts the endurance of time-honored and sacred ceremonies, even in the homogenized "non-places" of 21st-century America. As Kade Twist adds: "We're thinking about complicating recommendations. That's our role. Otherwise, we're just didactic ideologues."[13]

Cultural globalization has undermined notions of a central, or singular, art capital: a monolithic or "most important" place where artists must live and work to be taken seriously. Loss of faith in "the center" is not just a cultural phenomenon in 21st-century America. Consider the political protests mounted by grassroots groups like the Tea Party (whose members denounce "Washington" and "Big Government" and rally behind states' rights and federal deregulation) and Occupy (which in 2011 staged symbolic protests in Wall Street and 600 other U.S. locations addressing issues of social and economic inequity). Whether

political or cultural, backlash against central authority—or those who seemingly represent such authority—is strong in America today. While New York still claims to be the art capital of the world, the emergence of "second" cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, Santa Fe, and Seattle, each with its own mix of fairs, galleries, markets, and museums, suggests the art world's decentralization in multiple American spaces, places, and regions.[14] During 2011 and 2012, for example, the Getty organized *Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA, 1945–1980* in collaboration with 60 art museums and cultural institutions across Southern California. A second initiative, *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*, a series of thematically linked exhibitions focusing on Latin American art in Los Angeles, is planned for 2017 and 2018.

New Regionalism is similarly decentralized and diverse, less a shared aesthetic attuned to a particular political agenda (like New Deal oriented Regionalist art of the 1930s) than a variety of creative responses that consider how notions of "the local," however disrupted or denigrated, persist in the age of globalization. In *The Lure of the Local* (1997), critic Lucy Lippard observes that place is "latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political."[15] As a synthesis of space and memory, place is an expansive terrain for artistic exploration. It is especially meaningful, Lippard suggests, when artists critically examine their place in, and relationship to, particular places—especially those in which they may be newcomers or outsiders. For many, that may be a fairly common occurrence: statistics suggest that the average American moves from one place to the next about once every five years, sometimes just across town, sometimes across the country.

Today's place-centered artists follow the directives in Kenneth Frampton's 1983 essay "Toward a Critical Regionalism"—namely, to make art that recognizes the links between the local and the global and that negotiates their distinctions.[16] New Regionalist artists such as Hocking and Postcommodity understand how American places are invented, used, abandoned, and in some cases, rediscovered and repurposed; they see how places are susceptible to ever-shifting American needs and expectations.