

Introduction

The issue of 2023 is Playground.

The intent for choosing playground as a theme was originally to be playful and wispy since the last three volumes were sombre illustrations of the arts' response to a global health crisis. However, playground as a concept cannot remain playful. It is complex. While seemingly innocuous, play and ground as autonomous descriptors evoke some predictable responses. On the one hand, it could target the evergreen youthfulness of one's yesteryear. That is our childhood's central journey at a playground as being deterministic of self-actualisation through play on a ground removed from the embodiment of structures called home or school. However, play conjoined with ground conjure a multi-layered interplay of influences taxed with participatory adult games of war, peace, power and competition.

This volume commissioned artists, writers and art historians to look at the playground concept and investigate its potency as a vast, open and accessible space for sociocultural, physically embodied and artistically creative explorations. The essays reflect on a playground's normative and performative structures, especially in an increasingly surveilled terrain. The articles do not theorise or romanticise the playground but enlist its conceptual and social philosophies to speak to issues of concern to artists.

More than ever, playgrounds are weighed with contested freedoms of identities and ideologies in the determination of socio-cultural-political space. Whose space, what is contained within a space, who is entitled to be in this space and who controls the area are questions that remain in negotiation. In fact, this has been at the heart of the formation of the 20th century's primary political offering: the postcolonial nation-state, an endless line of perforations between communities, identities, languages, oceans and ideas—and an increasingly digital sphere of generative AI. The essays, conversation, reflections and exhibition echo a deeply anxious moment in history as we strive for attention in an otherwise noisy set of circumstances.