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Global turns in US art history

Caroline A. Jones et Steven Nelson

Traduction(s) :

[L'histoire de l'art aux États-Unis et le tournant vers la mondialité](#)

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- 1 Although the “melting pot” phrase became popular only after Israel Zangwill’s play of the same name (...)

Although globalization feels recent, questions directed at nationalism from a more worldly perspective were already being posed during the Great War. In 1916, for example, US legal scholar Randolph Bourne wrote an essay entitled “Trans-National America,” in which he advocated for a cosmopolitan mixture of cultures rather than the “melting pot” that had long been promoted in the United States (BOURNE, 1916).¹ Across the Atlantic (and within the enemy country), philosopher Franz Rosenzweig was rhapsodizing in Frankfurt about “world-historical spatial concepts” in his 1917 essay “Globus” (ROSENZWEIG, 1984). These prophetic intellectuals had no impact whatsoever on American art history, which remained, paradoxically, both provincial and fixated on Europe for at least the first half of the twentieth century, largely ignorant of universalist and transnational debates. The “global turn” happened in US art history most dramatically after the fall of Communism, when the giddy fantasy of a one-world economy galvanized

thinking in the academy, spanning from the humanities to social science and political theory. This essay traces the stuttering history, and future potential, of global thinking in art history as the discipline evolved in the United States. We will begin with a brief summary of the development of the field in this country, and then review the contextual forces and historical scholarship that established the landmarks of a new art history aspiring to globality. In conclusion, we will offer a polemic: that it is with the histories of art and architecture in the Cold War that “the global” becomes a necessary analytical tool.

2Globalization has taken art history and museums for a bumpy ride. It is a simple fact that our discipline was fueled by taxonomies organized by language, nation, and place that emerged from the great collector-connoisseurs of the Enlightenment (Pierre-Jean Mariette and Adam Bartsch), and were consolidated by the keepers of the treasure hoards of Europe (from Alois Riegl to André Malraux). In these domains, art history was for the most part ruled by national and linguistic schools, driven by a romance with geographical genius (“Dutch landscape”), and periodized under the sign of nations that had in fact been established long after the artworks in question (“Italian Renaissance”). Not surprisingly, then – with a few exceptions here and there – the discipline has been slow to propose questions on a global, transnational level, especially when compared with the fields of anthropology, sociology, or history in general.

Provincial beginnings

- 2 The term “American exceptionalism” refers to a set of stories on the unique nature of America as a [\(...\)](#)
- 3 William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, New [\(...\)](#)
- 4 “Boston Brahmin” was a name coined by popular author and legal scholar Oliver Wendell Holmes, who w [\(...\)](#)
- 5 While there are of course exceptions even within this same context, notably the pioneering work of [\(...\)](#)
- 6 Ledger drawings were made by Native Americans of the Great Plains in the late nineteenth and early [\(...\)](#)
- 7 In addition to the one being discussed here, we would include the Marxist, feminist, and social art [\(...\)](#)

3The provincialism of US art history was a factor, since this condition prevailed in American national narratives more broadly, couched as they were in notions of our own exceptionalism, which excused this general state of happy ignorance.² The first author of a national art history, William Dunlap, was the son of a British loyalist who became eager to prove his American patriotism after the revolution. He simply sought to contribute American material to an English-language literature regarding the existing European (and in this language mostly

Anglophile) taxonomies. He considered his 1834 book, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*³ to be a “reverse Gibbon.” Instead of the “Rise and Fall” of an empire, his chronicle would show the rise and further rise of a new republic’s visual culture, centered on his home town, New York (LYONS, 2005). Any nod to the rest of the world enters the author’s text only as a means to further highlight the ascendance and rapid maturation of American art and architecture. Against Dunlap’s boosterism, the next phase of US art history would be dominated by Charles Norton Eliot, whose Ruskinian teaching and values privileged only certain kinds of art – the Italian Primitives, say – as worthy of having a history, or of being taught to the young Boston Brahmins at Harvard.⁴ Norton’s selective and moralizing curriculum in the late-nineteenth century – which in turn informed the founding in 1896 of Harvard’s Fogg Museum and the early “museum course” taught by Paul Sachs in the 1920s and 1930s (Sachs helped propel Alfred Barr as the Museum of Modern Art’s founding director) – stands in sharp contrast to post-World War II art history. These keepers of art history’s nineteenth-century commitments (Norton, Sachs, Barr) saw little difference between historical study and connoisseurial discernment; the burden of art history in the US was to educate the predominantly ignorant citizenry in the finer fruits of Western Civilization.⁵ What was the point of learning or teaching about African American quilts or Native American drawing, when these were manifestly neither internationally-important signifiers of civilization, nor enhancements to US cultural capital? The fact that a late-nineteenth-century Native American ledger drawing⁶ now hangs in the newly reinstalled Harvard Art Museums in a room devoted to seventeenth- to nineteenth-century European and American art is proof of many revolutions.⁷ Not the least, we argue, is the transvaluation of the indigenous itself. On the one hand, the inclusion of a Native American drawing can stand for “First Peoples” as *A History Before Us* (always already local and chthonic, but also revealing a trace of prehistoric global migration). On the other hand – in the case of ledger drawings in particular – such a work, in concert with Harvard’s conscious mixture of American and European art, can bring traces of the global into what was formerly an “early American gallery” via the object’s testimony to colonial, imperial, and epistemological violence.

⁴Despite the overall provincialism of US art history, in a few instances before the professionalization of the discipline that would take place in the 1930s, some US-based art historians nodded towards global, comparative questions in their analyses of art. In his 1917 article “The Hunter Artists of the Old Stone Age,” published in *The Bulletin of the College Art Association of America*, retired University of Cincinnati history and economics professor Philip Van Ness Myers looked to comparative ethnology in his analysis of the rock art of France and Spain (VAN NESS MYERS, 1917). Attempting to provide a cultural explanation for the prehistoric art that he saw, Myers pointed to early twentieth-century non-Western cultures, comparing the European forms to those he knew of in Mexico, North America and southern Africa. Although Myers unselfconsciously used Bushmen, Hopi Indians, and Egyptians, among other “others,” to muse about

European Stone Age art, it was an important intervention by a scholar who would be criticized for his acceptance of evolutionary theory. Only two years later, Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Sri-Lankan born Curator of Indian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, wrote an *Art Bulletin* essay entitled “The Significance of Oriental Art,” in which he took to task the uninformed appropriation of “the Orient” by Western artists in particular and Western culture more generally, stressing, “those who look upon the East as mysterious and romantic have only themselves to thank for the creation of a novel unreality” (COOMARASWAMY, 1919, p. 17). Thus, while we might think of such inquiry as possible only within post-structuralism and its impact on contemporary thought regarding globalization, we see that nearly twenty years before the 1938 publication of Robert Goldwater’s *Primitivism in Modern Art* (GOLDWATER, [1938] 1986) and nearly sixty years before Edward Said’s 1978 *Orientalism* (SAID, 1978), Coomaraswamy was trying to make sense of the relationship between the West and the non-West, or, more appropriately, the romanticized and ahistorical penchant of the West for the non-West.

The violence of the global

- 8 John Onians, in the review noted here and in his “School of World Art Studies” at the University of (...)
- 9 The “politics of the partial view” as an artistic tactic are discussed in Jones’s forthcoming book, (...)

5The global we want to advocate for in the practice of art history today involves acknowledging such violence – a violence attested by objects (Native American ledgers) as well as concepts (the rigorous questioning of the motives of appropriation and othering found in the work of scholars such as Coomaraswamy, Goldwater, and Said, among others), a violence that figures *in and as* the global. This commitment requires simultaneously locating our own sighted/sitedness, working in universities on opposite coasts of the continental United States. Our own current projects are informative: Caroline A. Jones’s approach interrogates a largely Anglo-European “global art world” of world’s fairs and biennials as driven by enabling myths, from the national through international and transnational, to the contemporary semiotics of globalism today (JONES, forthcoming). Steven Nelson’s strategy occupies contiguous territory, taking as its foundation the historic and contemporary connections – diasporic and otherwise – between Africa and the rest of the world (NELSON, 2006). Such positions move between considering formations outside of Western art’s historical canon and the way in which they trouble convenient narratives of universalism. Moreover, such work articulates a healthy skepticism about the agendas inherent in formulations of global art histories that methodologically look no different from their national predecessors, or that make recourse to neuroscience for a retooled universalism (ONIAN, 2008a).⁸ Acknowledging what we don’t know, even as we historicize the

fantasy of global history, is a political position. We can only study from where we are, but, by the same token we must acknowledge the occlusions evident from that position, learning from contemporary artists who navigate the global art world daily just how powerful the politics of the partial view can be.⁹ In this regard, we propose that the sources for the global turn in US art history may reside as readily with the Africanist Robert Farris Thompson as with the self-conscious “global art history” of Baroque scholar Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann.

6It’s fair to say that in the United States, Robert Farris Thompson’s 1974 exhibition *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Corydon White* and his 1983 book *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* stand as important precursors to American art history’s global turn (*African art...*, 1974; THOMPSON, 1983). *African Art in Motion*, mounted at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. (one of only two African art shows ever presented at that institution), was the first large-scale art exhibition to animate masquerade through video documentation. In addition to introducing African masquerade to art publics, Thompson’s use of video provided a model of museum display that would be taken up not only in the exhibition of non-Western performance, but also in contemporary art itself. *Flash of the Spirit* – a text still widely read by artists, art historians, students, and the general public – joined Thompson’s *African Art in Motion* and other works in presenting an African art that was every bit as intellectually, philosophically, and aesthetically rigorous as anything produced in the Western canon. His scholarship radically revised Western understanding of African aesthetic systems. In addition to the technological contribution of *African Art in Motion* to museum display, Thompson’s work – and his position as a Yale University Art History professor – essentially opened the curriculum to include performative body adornments and kinesthetic values of beauty and truth, priming scholarship for the inclusive criteria (media, aesthetics, and cultural values) that “global” would necessitate.

7Thompson’s important work restored the force of Coomaraswamy’s questions from half a century before, blunted in the meantime by the “American Century” announced by Henry Luce in the new world order emerging after World War II, which promoted a Dunlapian narrative of American “rise and rise.” This 1950s interest in what American art might be came with an ambitious expansion in the international coverage of US art-history departments during the 1960s, as universities massively increased the size of their faculties. Some of this coverage was already in place, if scattered. East Asian art history had been a part of many departmental curricula since the early twentieth century. George Kubler had brought the study of pre-Columbian and Latin American art to Yale in 1938 (the University of Florida opened the first US-based Latin American Studies Center in the 1930s). Islamic art was featured through digs sponsored by archaeology departments at Princeton University and elsewhere during the 1930s. Stella Kramrisch brought the study of South Asian art to the University of Pennsylvania in 1954. And as for Africa, it is no accident that as American academia expanded

and as foreign aid joined hands with agribusiness to export the “green revolution” in the 1950s, the study of African nations’ languages and art began to proliferate in US universities, first in area studies programs and eventually in art history departments themselves, with the first African art history PhD awarded by the University of Iowa to Roy Sieber in 1957. After hiring Sieber as Associate Professor in 1962, Indiana University became the first to include an Africanist on its art history faculty (Thompson was appointed at Yale upon earning his doctorate in 1965). While fields of art-historical inquiry opened with the post-WWII expansion of American academia, this art history was not yet global. Although not acknowledged as such in the academy, these were largely essentialist projects that aligned with the burgeoning of independence movements abroad and of the fight for Civil Rights at home. While the American academy turned to the historic and the “traditional” arts – perhaps trying to figure out what was “truly Asante” in the weaving of Kente cloth in Ghana – Pan-Africanism on the ground, like Pan-Arabism or Indian nationalism during these same periods, emphasized modern renditions of whatever was privileged as “the people’s traditional forms,” often coupled with Social Realism in frankly propagandist and, at times, fiercely secular projects. As modernist and modernizing, these forms were abjured by traditional art history, because they were seen as imports or corruptions from the West.

Post-Wende Obsessions

- 10 John Agnew presented a conference paper titled, “We Have Always Been Global” at the conference “Env (...)

8Clearly it is with the sweep of neoliberalism, World Bank developmentalism, biennial culture, large-scale international exhibitions, and contemporary art nomadism that “the global” became a post-*Wende* obsession in art history (*Wende* or *Wendung*, German names for the “turning” following the collapse of the Soviet Union, provides a concise designation for the period that begins with 1989) – contemporaneous with the “invention” of the contemporary in 1990s art history and its pedagogical institutionalization. This burst of “the global contemporary” stimulated a compensatory move, to extend the art-historical gaze backwards in time and outwards in geography. We might call this, to borrow from geographer John Agnew, the “we have always been global” argument.¹⁰ Thus, beginning even before the *Wende* in the 1980s, *Annales* school historians such as Fernand Braudel, dependency theorists such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and world-systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein all contributed new perspectives, with scholarship that emphasized long-term interactions, which in turn generated core/periphery relationships and developed/underdeveloped structures of uneven exchange.

9Such broad historical framings were slow to have an impact on art history, which is more comfortable tracing specific objects as deposits of the extravagant

investments of empire in its own central narratives. See, for example, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's *Toward a Geography of Art* (2004), which uses the author's expertise in the arts of Central Europe under the Holy Roman Empire to drive its imperial focus: "The cultural model of the capital considerably determined, directly and indirectly, the nature of the artistic output throughout the imperial realms" (KAUFMANN, 2004, p. 181). Nonetheless, Kaufmann's deep investigation of the humanist methods of *géographie humaine* was very important in the US context, particularly since he rekindled interest in Kubler, who served to open generations of students – among them Thompson – to the force of cultural geography in an expanded, anthropologically-informed art history.

10That art history, emerging from the "peripheries" of Western art during the 1990s and emblemized by Thompson, built the appetite for Kaufmann's 2004 geography, but decidedly not in the image of Empire. Signaled by the polemic of Janet Abu-Lughod's brilliant *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, published in 1989, this was a new focus that ambitious art historians had to reckon with, even though it required radically different objects and scales than the introductory art-history curriculum had traditionally dealt with (ABU-LUGHOD, 1989). One scholar tirelessly expanding the art-historical ambit in such directions was Anthony D. King, a historian of urbanism who had appointments in sociology as well as art history at the University of Binghamton until his retirement in 2006. As editor of the 1991 compendium *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, with its important injection of post-colonial theory into world-system thinking, King was one of many who brought the anti-hegemonic components of post-colonial inquiry into the study of architecture, but in a very accessible way (KING, 1991). He participated in an American university practice of admitting foreign students to enlarge the English-language corpus on interdisciplinary and international material; some of his protégés went back to their home countries (Turkey, Brazil) but others took their specializations in areas such as Asian urbanism or their research into Sri Lankan modes of town planning to enrich and expand US university curricula.

Transatlantic glimmerings

11In 1986, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah's anthology "*Race, Writing and Difference*" offered another crucial benchmark. Insisting on the importance of race in the study of the Western literary tradition, Gates demonstrated its role in the very shaping of critical theory, particularly as that theory emerged in the African diaspora "globalizing" the United States. These essays, many of which were interventions on the under-acknowledged marriage of Western literature and imperialism, called for attention to the relationship between race, writing, and, as Gates so aptly insisted, "the difference it makes" (GATES, APPIAH, 1986, p. 1). Geographically and textually, this anthology posited that places where cultures clash, places where people meet can effectively be called

“contact zones,” as Mary Louise Pratt put it in her contribution to the volume. Related both to Pratt’s characterization and to formulations of world-systems analysis is the rise of Transatlantic studies, which began to insist on dissolving the national or linguistic hold on cultural studies and turned to the examination of movement and interminglings. This American trajectory found its counterpart, fittingly, across the Atlantic. In 1993, British Guyanese literary scholar Paul Gilroy published his landmark study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (GILROY, 1993). Within its pages, the London-based author responded to Jamaican-born cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s reformulation of the political importance and force of diasporic study, while also reviving interest in American W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 theorization of “double consciousness” for African Americans in US society. Both Gilroy and Hall posited the Atlantic Ocean – and the Transatlantic slave trade – as a powerful harbinger of the modern world and as a corrective to narratives of Western modernity as a progressive, Enlightenment project. Such attention to black and diasporic counternarratives also found expression in Gates’ *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, where the argument reinforced these counternarratives of blackness as foundational to the formulation of critical theory (GATES, 1989). These critical turns in US literary theory, particularly those by Gates, Pratt, and Homi Bhabha, began to fuel the conceptualization of global art histories, both in US academies and among scholars based outside of the West.

- 11 See the “About” section on the website Slave Voyages for the long history of this database project: [\(...\)](#)

12Histories of American slavery – the original sin marring the new world’s Eden – have sparked an intensely capitalized initiative driven by US scholars’ interest in precisely quantifying the transatlantic slave trade.¹¹ Such histories, in tandem with our understanding of the Atlantic as a harbinger of modernity, have inevitably pressured US art history to take account of global forces in, for example, the circulation of art objects during the days of the early Republic (ROBERTS, 2014). Mirroring those efforts to decenter Europe by going back to earlier empires in Central Asia (ABU-LUGHOD, 1989), Americanists – in a manner not unlike the move on the part of the Harvard Art Museums to “diversify” American and European art – look to the global to give their work relevance in a broadening discourse about networks of trade, modes of circulation, and flows of power. Similarly, talk of the “Pacific Rim” in economic circles during the 1990s activated earlier post-war interests in an *école du Pacifique*, and drew networks of scholars together for shared discussions of cultural forces that shaped art from Australia through Indonesia to the indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest Coast and extending south to Latin America’s pre-Columbian coastal empires. As with the attention given to art objects circulating around the Atlantic during the Early American Republic, scholars are now beginning similar inquiries into artifacts moving around the Pacific well before the twentieth century.

Millennial global agendas

13By the mid-2000s, the global had become a minor industry in Anglophone art history, as the scholarly book trade reveals. *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West*, by British scholars Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, aims to follow trade and markets to their logical destinations (JARDINE, BROTTON, 2000), and Chicago-trained Anna Brzyski's edited volume *Partisan Canons* aspires to investigate and challenge the formation of canons over a very broad geographic terrain covering the United States, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Taiwan, and South Africa (BRZYSKI, 2007). James Elkins, prolific on many topics, produced the single-author *Stories of Art* with its important pluralization of Ernst Gombrich's master narrative (ELKINS, 2002). His two edited volumes *Is Art History Global?* (ELKINS, 2006) and *Art and Globalization* (ELKINS, VALIAVICHARSKA, KIM, 2010), explicitly address the new thematic. As architectural historian Mark Jarzombek put it pithily in that last volume, "Nothing has been better for the global expansion of art history than the globalized claim for a local resistance to globalization" (ELKINS, VALIAVICHARSKA, KIM, 2010, p. 191). In fact, Jarzombek argues that architecture, which promoted the proliferation of "globalist modernisms" along with national projects on several continents, pitted itself against art history's regressive politics of preservation and "static nationhood" (p. 192). Jarzombek's collaborative *A Global History of Architecture* (CHING, JARZOMBEB, PRAKASH, 2010), along with Kathleen James-Chakraborty's *Architecture Since 1400* (JAMES-CHAKRABORTY, 2013), made considerable headway in establishing a concomitant global architectural history that rivals the art-historical survey's new global aspirations. In certain cases the global reveals itself in a new modesty. The traditional art-historical survey represented by H. W. Jansen's *History of Art* is now offered in two volumes, with a humbler title: *History of Art: The Western Tradition* (DAVIES et al., 2010). Gardner's *Art through the Ages* is also evolving, with its own *Western Tradition* in parallel to the edition that wants it all: *Art through the Ages: A Global History* (KLEINER, 2012). Thames and Hudson are following suit with a similar arrangement of survey texts.

14US museums and curators participated in and contributed to this millennial global turn. Jane Farver's *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (*Global Conceptualism*, 1999), Philippe Vergne's *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age (How Latitudes..., 2003)*, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) curator Rob Storr's 2005 symposium for the Venice Biennale *Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (STORR, 2007), joined by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin's *Global Feminisms (Global Feminisms, 2007)*, all insisted on interrogating "the global" as part of their briefs. The conjunction of contemporary and global was a welcome shift from the "world art" focus that had earlier – in a colonialist fashion – placed "peripheries" in a perpetual past that could never be modern or contemporary.

15The US curators cited above mark the arrival of a new generation (or, in the case

of Nochlin and Reilly, an earlier generation collaborating with a younger one). These new curatorial approaches turn explicitly and critically away from certain museum practices dating to the 1980s, practices that recycled the primitivism of modernist artists and of world's fairs and invoked the salvage paradigm of anthropology. In the context of all the postcolonial and poststructuralist critique emerging from US universities at this time, the benighted nature of museum curation was exemplified by the 1984 MoMA exhibition *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and Modern* (*'Primitivism'...*, 1984) – which seemed old-fashioned and outdated as soon as it opened.

16The MoMA show unselfconsciously installed non-Western art in light of its “discovery” by Picasso and the like, as a means of highlighting European male genius. It incited a maelstrom of angry responses from those invested in understanding and undoing the colonial and neocolonial reverberations of a kind of modernism couched in, as James Clifford reminded us, “a search for ‘informing principles’ that transcend culture, politics, and history” (CLIFFORD, 1988, p. 191). While *“Primitivism”* still exists as a lesson on how not to be “global,” the Eurocentric, Enlightenment tenets that fueled the exhibition are arguably rarer in the United States than in Europe, where their primitivist tendencies can be discerned in Jean-Hubert Martin’s 1989 show for the Paris biennial, *Magiciens de la terre* (*Magiciens...*, 1989), followed by his Lyon biennial, *Partage d'exotismes* (*Partage d'exotismes*, 2000). From the perspective of US-based scholars, these attempts might be praised for featuring fifty artists from the United States and Europe alongside of fifty from Africa, Asia, Australia, and Latin America – but its fundamental myopia with regard to postcolonial theory served as an important goad to widespread critique. Shortly after the exhibition’s opening, Benjamin Buchloh, in an *Art in America* interview with curator Martin, explicitly tied *Magiciens* to a history of European colonialism in which the search for and exhibition of transhistorical and transcultural aesthetic experience and “spirituality” ignores political and social realities. US scholars have also criticized the “worldly” sensibilities of the Musée du quai Branly, which opened in 2006 and was described by *New York Times* art critic Michael Kimmelman as “a spooky jungle,” where art objects from the indigenous cultures of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas “are jumbled all together without much reason or explanation, save for visual theatrics” (KIMMELMAN, 2006), and where the reinstalled colonial collections include Islamic or Jewish ritual objects, for example, but not Catholic ones. Unlike the kinds of museum practices and outreach that have occurred in American and British museums since the 1980s (including the involvement of Native communities in the staging and/or repatriation of their artifacts), the acritical embrace of ongoing fictions such as the “spiritual,” “mysterious” Other speaks to a reticence to come to terms with the colonialist past, as well as its ongoing legacy in the Parisian banlieues. Lest this seem exclusively a French problem, we note that even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Karlsruhe-based art historian Hans Belting was still offering a European/non-European binary in which he insisted, within the contexts of world art and

Magiciens: “There is the question whether tribal culture – yes, I dare say it – has *no art*, even while its images display the highest artistic skill” (BELTING, 2003, p. 67). Such comments reveal art historians’ reactionary anxieties about the diversification of the art world while fueling the policing of the contemporary, or for that matter the modern or medieval, canon.

17 However troubling *Magiciens de la terre*’s geopolitical and social politics were, it launched the international careers of a number of non-Western artists now unproblematically considered “contemporary.” It also fed the glimmerings of new area studies, as fields of non-Western contemporary art have emerged both in and out of academia. The rise of auction markets in India and China is one factor, the continuing emergence of new curators, another. US-educated curators could not match the power of the multilingual, cosmopolitan, globally nomadic curators that burst on the scene beginning in the mid-1990s, such as Okwui Enwezor, Hans Ulrich Obrist, or Hu Hanru. The fact that the latter has just been hired to spearhead Asian initiatives for the Guggenheim Museum in New York is the latest sign of the penetration of the global into the core mission of US modernist museums.

Global Hegemony?

- 12 See Takashi Murakami, *Geijutsu Kigyo Ron [The Art Entrepreneurship Theory]*, Tokyo, 2005.

18 But with globalization, other than the appearance of an expanded and possibly more diverse set of actors at the table, has art history changed in any meaningful fashion? Has the post-1989 rise of the itinerant curator and artist changed the ways that the art world operates, or has “the global contemporary” simply made a Western language of art practice and criticism more essential, and more financially sound, for the ambitious artist? Put another way, and perhaps nodding to Belting’s anxiety about the incommensurability of “natives” placed into international circuits of cutting-edge visual practices, it seems that in large part much of what has been successful on the global stage are the kinds of practices that we already know. As Caroline A. Jones theorizes in *The Global Work of Art*, ambitious artists “must speak the international language, but will often be forced to speak of their own difference” (JONES, forthcoming). They are presented in an African, Asian, or Latin American package. We see the newest works from South Africa, China, Brazil, or Nigeria, and the ones that most catch our attention are those we can neatly place in categories of Western contemporary art (to be a global success, Japanese artist Takashi Murakami advises artists to cite as influences “Warhol and Duchamp”).¹² As such, the world has become more global, but often in the global we find our Western selves.

- 13 Picasso applied for naturalization in 1940 but was rejected by French authorities, who feared he wa (...)

19 Art history is certainly not immune to such problems. Although global art history has considered a broader range of objects and has, at times, thought about artwork differently, the theorization of a truly global art history often integrates the new into the well-established norms of the discipline. And this is not necessarily a bad thing; we need to correct the canon, perhaps first of all. Over nearly a century, some US-based art historians have made progress in considering the art object and architectural monument as repositories of influence and nodes of exchange. For example, even as modernist art historians such as Robert Goldwater charted the non-Western or “primitive” influences on early twentieth-century avant-garde artists in Europe or the United States, they also treated those non-Western objects that made their way into European collections as objects of circulation. It is because of the global movement of peoples and objects that the immigrant Spaniard Picasso or the native-born Frenchman Georges Braque could accomplish their visual breakthroughs in Paris.¹³ The US case was no different. Euro-American collector Albert Barnes and African American philosopher Alain Locke, taking note of the transportation of African art (much of which would move to Barnes’ own home), exhorted African American artists to take up the arts of Africa in forging a modern black art in the United States. (Max Weber, a Jewish artist in New York, would violate such ethnic determinism in his interests in African and/or Chinese decorative cultures.) Africanist, Asianist, and Latin Americanist scholars have long considered the ways in which objects from these continents have affected the arts of the United States. In many of these studies, tracing the movement and circulation of non-Western objects adds crucial nuance to the understanding of what, possibly, culture could even *be* in this country without the global circulation and transfer of knowledge, technical practices, culture, and imagery. To return to our earlier example, Robert Farris Thompson’s focus on African art (and African retentions), conveyed to the hands and minds of contemporary African Americans, has led to a broad, not always unproblematic, consideration of the “African” in “African American.” Be it modernist, African American, Latino/a, or “voluntary Orientalist,” the movement of objects and ideas from the non-West can sometimes be a way to further focus on our motley selves.

20 So, then, does the ascendance of a global art history really challenge the discipline’s Eurocentrism or does a newly global art history simply repackage it? To be sure, the geographic expansion of art history’s interests brings new things and new connections to light. Moreover, scholars such as Elkins, forging ahead where people such as Belting have thrown up their hands, have attempted to theorize how a multicultural present might inform a truly changed art-historical practice. Partha Mitter has proposed an open-ended global art history that, in his words, “challenges Hegelian teleology and allows different trajectories to flourish” (MITTER, 2008a, p. 568). Such calls pressure the discipline to think about the difference that a global art history could make, simultaneously pointing out the risk of a remaining universalism that threatens remanent *difference*. Crucially, it is important that we continue to confront our biases in how we treat different players in the “global” arena. As Saloni Mathur reminds us, Picasso’s famous

Trocadéro encounter, his tryst with African art, “was heralded as aesthetic breakthrough, whereas the colonial subjects’ appropriations and responses to Analytic Cubism or Post-Impressionism have been viewed as derivative, imitative, secondary, or belated” (MATHUR, 2008, p. 559). Her critique, pointing out how art history continues to deny agency and coeval development to historical agents from outside the Euro-American ambit, reveals how we still cling to Enlightenment ideals of taste and ingenuity that all too often skew towards buttressing and celebrating the work of European – or Euro-American – men.

21 Adding urgency to these issues, Aruna D’Souza rightly insists that the global turn is not only a question of research in a neoliberal *now*, but also a question of relevance and survival within an entrepreneurial academic culture in the business of producing a global citizenry (D’SOUZA, 2014, p. xix-xx). Those of us who write and think also teach. As such, the sincere push to expand art history’s global possibilities as a way of changing how we do what we do, as well as better understanding how art operates in this expanded field of inquiry, remains utopian. In the real world, it cannot be completely separated from the need to maintain relevance in a larger setting inflected by the multinational university, newly corporatized sources of funding, and the politics of international development.

The Global Cold War

22 By way of conclusion, we offer a final meditation on when and where it becomes imperative to think the global as a necessary condition of history. If we are confronted with the legacy of art history itself as a Euro-American discourse, then let us historicize how and when the global as such entered the discourse of practitioners, which we argue is the long Cold War. It is at that moment, with a new world order of bloc politics and bipolar allegiances, that “the globe” emerges as terrain to be divided up after the Second World War. During this period, art and architecture were to be taken up as tools by the West, the Soviet Union, and Communist China to forge relationships with the rest of the world. This epoch, which began with the “Third World,” “bloc politics,” “neoimperialism,” and the “Iron Curtain” in the early Cold War, evolved into a later Cold War scene in which international travel, “festivals of free expression,” International Style architecture in newly-independent nations, mail art, hippie tourism, the drug trade, artist-run galleries, the *Whole Earth Catalog’s* mail-order architecture, new centers of film production, and an incipiently global conceptualism began to proliferate.

23 The First World Festival of Negro Art (FESMAN), staged in Dakar, Senegal in 1966, became a stage where Cold War dynamics played a part. FESMAN attracted artists, writers and performers of African descent from all over the world, a healthy contingent of African and French dignitaries, and a large cohort of Euro-Americans (including Thompson). The Soviets made their presence known by

sending noted poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko along with a contingent of journalists, musicians, and a large cruise ship that alleviated the crowding of Dakar's hotels. Duke Ellington performed at FESMAN, only to be countered by a dynamic reading by Yevtushenko. Beyond such showdowns, black American cultural producers came aboard the Soviet ship, communing with their Soviet counterparts. Despite FESMAN's international array of offerings and despite the fact that Yevtushenko was extraordinarily well known, the State Department insisted that, led by Ellington, the United States was clearly the festival favorite. Beyond festivals, the International Style architecture that characterized many post-World War II African and Asian cities was also indicative of the efforts of the superpowers to court and influence the Third World. At least on the African continent, beyond the presence of the United States, Western Europe, the Soviet Union, and Communist China that lurked behind these structures, either through the architects hired or through financing, such buildings allowed the leaders of newly-independent nations to invoke architecture as a means of transcending tribal affiliation. Such developments speak to the varying layers of global involvement and the multiple trajectories set into motion in the intersection of the Cold War, decolonization, and neocolonialism. Our curiosity about the juncture of the Cold War with developments around the globe was the impetus for our 2014 US College Art Association session "The Global Sixties: Art in the Cold War," which sought to retrieve some of these lost moments and to investigate the continuities between Cold War and post-1989 globalisms.

24The exhibitionary complex that parallels this Cold War crucible of the global is found in the form of the biennial. Biennials were founded as a form in Venice in 1895, but their proliferation had a first phase during the Cold War, when São Paulo's biennial in 1951 inaugurated repeating exhibitions (Documenta, for example) that largely engaged Western- and US-bloc regions in demonstrations of internationalism "in the free world." The second phase of proliferation came in the twilight of Soviet communism, with Havana leading a "Third World" biennial beginning in 1987. These events had an impact on art history through their sheer number and fueled an expanding non-Euro-American market, which could no longer be organized around "modern art," but began to splinter, first into "contemporary," and then into regional specialties such as "contemporary Middle Eastern art" or "contemporary Chinese." Biennials thus scrambled the Cold War blocs but then, following the *Wende*, remapped old power into new configurations, such as "Manifesta=Eurozone," where "Europe" becomes an imaginary produced in roving centers from Ljubljana to Saint Petersburg.

25In dealing with the biennialization of the contemporary art world, Jones has theorized critical globalism as one artistic practice that yields valuable insights for a similarly critical practice of global art history. Regardless of origin, artists may situate their studios in Berlin or Brooklyn, Paris or London – or not. In a way that would have been unthinkable in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or even twentieth century, an artist with worldly ambitions can now maintain a stubbornly peripheral location, and still participate fully in a globalized art world and its

largely northern-hemispheric venues. Georges Adéagbo lives in Cotonou, Benin, yet makes his installations on site – there they are, in Paris, Berlin, New York, or Venice, globally present and embedded with sly critiques of the “outsider artist” status that art history confers on such located practices. This, then, is the best hope for the global turn in art history – that it has primed us to “discover” critical globalism on the ground. Encountering artists and art fully conceived within a global optic and critical of its myopias, we can only hope to take up the intellectual tools honed by others in a century of sputtering theorizations of the global – in order to expand the canon to include both the art, and the theory.

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Notes

1 Although the “melting pot” phrase became popular only after Israel Zangwill’s play of the same name in 1908, the melting-together metaphor was in use already in the 18th century. On Bourne, also see ENRIQUEZ, 2010.

2 The term “American exceptionalism” refers to a set of stories on the unique nature of America as a nation founded on principles of religious freedom, democracy, and personal liberty.

3 William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, New York, 1834.

4 “Boston Brahmin” was a name coined by popular author and legal scholar Oliver

Wendell Holmes, who wrote a series of essays in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1860 about the descendants of the original Puritan settlers, who had become a kind of moral aristocracy in the New England region.

[5](#) While there are of course exceptions even within this same context, notably the pioneering work of Ananda Coomaraswamy (at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) on Indian art (one of his texts is noted in this essay) and gestural semiotics, or Charles Lang Freer's collecting of Asian art, the academic curriculum in these fields was very delayed.

[6](#) Ledger drawings were made by Native Americans of the Great Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and serve as a pictorial representation of their history. The name comes from the practice of making drawings in ledger books.

[7](#) In addition to the one being discussed here, we would include the Marxist, feminist, and social art histories of the 1980s, which in turn drove translations and revival of the Vienna school and the reinvention of "art history from below."

[8](#) John Onians, in the review noted here and in his "School of World Art Studies" at the University of East Anglia, has posited a "neuroarthistory," which suggests that by understanding normal brain features we gain "access to the deepest recesses of the human mind, in whatever place or period it is found, without requiring any reference to language," and are thus better equipped to understand art worldwide (ONIAN'S 2008b). How normal brain features yield the infinite variety of human cultural expression is not well addressed by this theory.

[9](#) The "politics of the partial view" as an artistic tactic are discussed in Jones's forthcoming book, *The Global Work of Art* (JONES, forthcoming).

[10](#) John Agnew presented a conference paper titled, "We Have Always Been Global" at the conference "Envisioning Globalization" at the University of Chicago in 2001. Cited in Felicity Nussbaum ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century*, Baltimore, 2003, p. 326.

[11](#) See the "About" section on the website Slave Voyages for the long history of this database project: www.slavevoyages.org/tast/about/history.faces (viewed on October 24, 2015).

[12](#) See Takashi Murakami, *Geijutsu Kigyo Ron [The Art Entrepreneurship Theory]*, Tokyo, 2005.

[13](#) Picasso applied for naturalization in 1940 but was rejected by French authorities, who feared he was "still an anarchist." See Alex Duval Smith, "Revealed, secret battle 'anarchist' Picasso lost to become French," in *The Guardian*, May 2, 2004, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/02/france.arts> (viewed November

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